

Unit 1: Major Themes from Minor Prophets

Lesson 5 | March 30, 2025

God Will Make All Things Right

Study Text

Joel 3:1–21; Obadiah 1–21; Zechariah 2:1–13

Central Truth

God's purposes will prevail.

Key Verse: Zechariah 10:6

They shall be as though I had not cast them off: for I am the LORD their God, and will hear them (KJV).

“It will be as though I had never rejected them, for I am the LORD their God, who will hear their cries” (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will comprehend and appreciate a fuller view of God's nature.
- Students will perceive the greatness of God.
- Students will obey the Lord and encourage others to do the same.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: Some people think of God primarily as a judge, ready to destroy the wicked. Others think of God primarily as a redeemer, working to restore the repentant. The Minor Prophets show us how God's work of judgment is part of God's work of redemption.

Discussion Starter—Discipline and Development

Say: How do you know it's time to discipline a child for his or her own benefit? How do you know when discipline is too much or too little?

Say: Depending on how you typically view God, the prophets' words may be difficult to understand. But a proper view of God includes the realization that God's judgment of evil is part of God's salvation from evil. God judges so that He might save.

The prophecies discussed in this lesson take us on a journey through the nature and work of God in our world. Obadiah, Joel, and Zechariah all contribute to a full understanding of God's character as both Judge and Redeemer. These are not competing views of God. Rather, God's justice and mercy are both part of who He is and how He works in a world plagued by sin. Yes, evil people will do terrible things, but these prophets make it clear that God will someday make all things right.

Part 1—God Judges Arrogant Betrayers

The Consequences of Pride

Obadiah 1–9

Say: Even though the people of Edom shared common ancestry with the people of Judah, they positioned themselves as Judah's enemies. But God promised they would be completely destroyed because of their arrogance.

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament and includes almost no information about its author. Although multiple Old Testament characters bear the name Obadiah, the writer of this book remains unknown. The one thing we know for sure from the twenty-one verses in the Book of Obadiah is that the nation of Edom was about to be judged by God.

Edom and Judah shared an ancestral connection to the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, Edom was mostly a thorn in the side of Israel and eventually Judah as well. When Judah was conquered by the Babylonians in 586 BC, Edom's attitude angered God. In His wrath, God showed Obadiah that Edom was about to be entirely destroyed because of their attitude and actions when Judah was experiencing God's judgment.

Edom was located southeast of Israel on the opposite side of the Jordan River. While much of their land was surrounded by desert, Edom itself was filled with red sandstone mountains, providing a natural defense against enemy attack. When the Babylonians began expanding their empire, Edom quickly submitted to them and smugly settled into their well-protected territory, confident they were safe.

Their arrogance was their undoing. Through the prophet Obadiah, God reminded them that no fortress or army can protect any nation from the all-powerful God (Obadiah 2–4). In a series of word pictures, God explained that the destruction of Edom would be complete. Thieves cannot take everything when they rob a home, and even the most thorough farmers cannot pick every grape, but when God judged Edom, there would be nothing left (verses 5–6). Their apparent wisdom and military power would not save them when their so-called allies turned against them (verses 7–9).

All peoples and nations should heed Edom's downfall. Nations may advance through natural advantages, economic resources, technology, or military strength, but God is all-powerful and omnipresent. No nation is beyond His reach. Arrogance may put individual people in direct opposition to God as well. No one can win that battle.

Resource Packet Item 1: The Arrogance of Edom and Beyond

Students will consider Edom's arrogance and the ways modern nations and individuals fall into the same destructive pattern.

Discuss

? Throughout the Bible, why does arrogance bring a strong response from God?

? What are some things people (and even nations) trust instead of God? What are the results of this kind of attitude?

The End of Arrogance

Obadiah 10–21

Say: Have you ever heard of *schadenfreude* (SHAH-den-froid-uh)? It's a German term that combines the words for "harm" and "joy," and it means "taking pleasure in someone else's misfortune." It perfectly captures the attitude in Edom as they watched Judah being overrun by Babylon.

Edom's destruction was a direct result of their arrogance. Because they rejoiced in Judah's suffering—and even participated in it—God would bring judgment upon them as well. Obadiah 10–14 lists six ways Edom reacted to Judah's destruction.

1. Instead of coming to the defense of their "close relatives," Edom "stood aloof" and watched from a place of safety as foreign invaders divided up the spoils of Judah (verses 10–11). Psalm 137:7 recounts how the Edomites reacted when Babylon invaded: "'Destroy it!' they yelled. 'Level it to the ground!'"
2. They gloated when the people of Judah were carried off to Babylon as prisoners (Obadiah 12).
3. They rejoiced at Judah's pain and bragged during their trouble (verse 12).
4. Their arrogant attitudes led to evil actions as the Edomites looted Judah, taking advantage of the chaos and destruction to steal whatever the Babylonians had left behind.
5. When some of the people of Judah tried to escape, the Edomites were waiting for them at the crossroads, killing some and capturing others.
6. Trying to solidify their alliance with Babylon, the Edomites handed over their captives to be carried off as prisoners of war.

Because of their arrogance and evil behavior, God decreed judgment against the Edomites: "As you have done to Israel, so it will be done to you. All your evil deeds will fall back on your own heads" (verse 15). Judah's suffering was temporary, but no such hope remained for the Edomites (verses 17–21). All their land, their wealth, and their mountain fortresses would be possessed by others. Edom would cease to be anything but a footnote in the history books.

Arrogance skews our thoughts and behaviors. When we think of ourselves more highly than we should, we fall prey to selfishness, envy, anger, violence, and cruelty. Sometimes arrogance even keeps us from recognizing our own sinfulness; instead, we simply justify our actions as fair and right since we know best. But we must remember David's words in Psalm 5: "You are not a God who is pleased with wickedness; with you, evil people are not welcome. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence" (verses

4–5). One day, God will judge every enemy who has arrogantly positioned themselves against Him and His people.

Discuss

? Obadiah makes it clear that part of Edom's sin was what they *didn't* do to help their kinsmen. James 4:17 says, "It is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it." What are some things that we should be doing as God's people that we are not currently doing?

Part 2—God Judges Human Traffickers A Terrible Currency

Joel 3:1–7

Say: Every human being is "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14, KJV) and created in God's image (Genesis 1:27). This means a person's value can never be measured in dollars and cents.

Of all the Minor Prophets, Joel is one of the hardest to place in a specific time and set of circumstances. Some believe the book was written before the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC, while others believe it should be placed as late as the 400s BC, after the exiles returned from Babylon and the temple was rebuilt. Context aside, the Book of Joel is made up of several poetic prophecies, including vivid promises of redemption.

Joel 3 describes the nations who had oppressed God's people being gathered to receive retribution. Some of the cruelties these nations had perpetrated sound all too familiar in our day: "They cast lots for my people and traded boys for prostitutes; they sold girls for wine to drink" (verse 3, NIV). Casting lots was a way of deciding something through random chance. These wicked nations treated Israel's children as a commodity. They could not have wounded the soul of God's people more effectively.

While Joel gave no specific age when he described these children, the Hebrew words usually refer to very young boys and girls. The evildoers who captured these children traded them for alcohol and the services of prostitutes. God would repay this unthinkable depravity: "I will strike swiftly and pay you back for everything you have done" (verse 4). Not only that, but He would bring His people back from the distant places where they had been taken (verse 7).

Sadly, this deplorable sin continues on a massive scale today as children are bought and sold around the globe—even in so-called advanced and modern societies. In the *2023 Trafficking in Persons Report*, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken wrote, "Every year millions of people are exploited within and across borders. They are forced to work in factories for little or no pay; harvest crops; toil in terrible conditions in mines, construction sites, and fishing boats; or work in private homes. Many victims are exploited for commercial sex, adults and children alike."¹ (***Play the Lesson 5 video***

about ministering to victims of human trafficking. You can download it for free at radiantlifecurriculum.com/resources.)

This exploitation is an affront to righteousness and the dignity of humans as image-bearers of God. Slavery was an economic reality unchallenged by any culture during the time of the Bible, but both the Old and New Testaments offer protections for those held in slavery (Exodus 21:26–27, Deuteronomy 15:12–18, Ephesians 6:9, Philemon 12–16). Alongside Joel 3, 1 Timothy 1:10 also condemns human traffickers or “slave traders.” Just as the Lord said in Joel 3 that He would swiftly and terribly judge those who had victimized His people this way, we can be certain that God will one day judge everyone who deals in human trafficking—or takes advantage of vulnerable people in any way. In the meantime, believers should advocate for oppressed and defenseless people (Isaiah 1:17) and leave revenge “to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, ‘I will take revenge; I will pay them back,’ says the LORD” (Romans 12:19).

Discuss

? Why do you think God drew attention to the specific sin of human trafficking?
? What are some ways believers today can help protect vulnerable and exploited people? (Consider visiting the following websites to learn more: dhs.gov/blue-campaign, projectrescue.com, ijm.org.)

Promise of Redemption

Joel 3:20–21

Say: Judah had been guilty of many sins, but God’s promise to them in Joel 3:20–21 offered hope. Because of Jesus’ fulfillment of this promise, Joel’s words continue to provide hope for us today.

After describing the judgment He would visit on the wicked, God promised reversal and blessing for His people. In concrete terms, God declared that Judah would be inhabited forever (Joel 3:20). They had experienced invasion, destruction, scattering, and oppression many times in their history, but there is no expiration date on this promise. It extends to all generations.

In verse 21, God issued a final declaration concerning His people’s guilt. Although they had sinned greatly (and suffered greatly because of it), He would pardon and cleanse them completely. The text literally reads, “I have pardoned the blood guilt, even that which I have not already pardoned.” In God’s final action of redemption, no remnant of sin would remain.

What God’s people hoped for in the Old Testament, God’s people experienced in the New Testament. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, all unresolved sin and guilt is completely pardoned and cleansed. This redemption is available today to anyone who will call on Jesus. While everything in this world is temporary—including sin and suffering—God’s people can look forward to wholeness and restoration that will never end.

Resource Packet Item 2: God's Great Forgiveness

The Bible is full of God's grace and forgiveness. Students will read several verses and note what each one teaches about God's gracious gift.

Discuss

? Is there any sin in your life that feels too big to forgive? How does God's grace to Judah show us that no one is beyond the reach of His redemption?

Part 3—God Identifies with His People

The Great Gathering

Zechariah 2:1–9

Say: In Zechariah 2, what started as an unusual vision became a hope-filled prophecy. The image of God as a passionate companion and fierce defender still offers hope today.

Zechariah had the challenge and privilege of prophesying just after God's people returned to Jerusalem after the seventy years of exile in Babylon. God gave messages to Zechariah in the form of visions. In Zechariah 2, the prophet received a vivid message regarding God's plan for the new Jerusalem.

In his vision, Zechariah saw a man walking along with a measuring line in his hand, on his way to "measure Jerusalem, to see how wide and how long it is" (verse 2). From this mysterious beginning, God delivered a rousing message of restoration and hope. After seven decades of desolation, Jerusalem was about to become a bustling international city. It would be filled with people and livestock, but it would have no walls. How could the city thrive without this protection?

When Babylon came to destroy Jerusalem, the city walls had failed to protect the people. But the new Jerusalem would not need a wall at all, because the Lord would protect the city: "I myself will be a wall of fire around it," declares the LORD, "and I will be its glory within" (verse 5, NIV).

Next, God summoned His people to "Come away!" (verses 6–7). In the Hebrew text, this word appears three times, serving as an interjection to grab the people's attention with a shout of enthusiasm. The long exile was finally over. God's treasured people were coming home.

Discuss

? How have you experienced God's protecting power?

? How do you think God's enthusiastic call for His people to come home would have sounded to those who heard it first?

God Will Be with His People

Zechariah 2:10–13

Say: Zechariah 2:10–13 contains the renewal of an ancient promise and the institution of a new promise that would be fulfilled in Jesus. The only fitting response to these promises was to “shout and rejoice” (verse 10)!

The people of Judah had been used to singing in worship, but in Babylon, they felt no reason to sing. Psalm 137 describes how the exiles hung up their harps and asked, “How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a pagan land?” (verse 4). But after God calls them to return home, He commands them to shout and rejoice again (Zechariah 2:10).

This celebration was not just because they were returning home, but it was anchored in a much deeper promise: God was going to be with them. After being separated from God because of their sin and rebellion, their exile from His presence was ending. One of the greatest promises in all of Israel’s history was the one God spoke to Moses after giving him the Law: “I will live among the people of Israel and be their God” (Exodus 29:45). After a painful season in which it must have felt like God had abandoned them, they were called to rejoice, because His promise was still true.

As great as this news was for the people of Judah, many nations were now invited to join in relationship with God (Zechariah 2:11). This was good news for the whole world. Access to God was not limited to a small group of people based on ethnic identity, but people everywhere could now be welcomed into His presence. This is the miracle Jesus accomplished on the cross. His actions broke down the wall that divided Jew from Gentile. As the apostle Paul would write almost six hundred years later, “He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death” (Ephesians 2:15–16).

It is a fitting response to sing with joy to God. He has kept His promises and invited all people to be part of His family. We can all be at home in His presence. Just as Judah’s exile was over, through Jesus, our exile can be over too. Rejoice!

Resource Packet Item 3: Your Psalm of Praise

Students will review the joyful celebration of Psalm 100 and try to write their own psalm of praise. This handout would work best as a take-home page for personal devotions.

Discuss

? What is a song of worship that fills you with joy when you sing it to the Lord?
? Who are some people groups or nations you could pray for that they may find their place in the presence of the Lord? (If you don’t know of any unreached people groups, check out joshuaproject.net.)

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The people addressed by the Minor Prophets were well-acquainted with sin and wickedness—both as perpetrators and victims. But the passages in this lesson remind all of us that even when things are at their worst, God is still faithful. He promises hope and restoration through Jesus, and one day He will make all things right.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Pray for people who have not yet heard about God's redemptive plan.
- Pray for and support people who are working to rescue victims of human trafficking.
- Examine your heart to root out any arrogance that could separate you from God.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

God humbles and exalts.

1 Samuel 2:1–10

Tuesday:

God preserves and repays.

Psalms 31:16–24

Wednesday:

God devours and delivers.

Psalms 50:1–6, 14–15

Thursday:

Jesus anointed to restore.

Luke 4:14–21

Friday:

Creator and Judge.

Acts 17:22–31

Saturday:

Alpha and Omega.

Revelation 22:12–17

1. Read the full report at <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/>.