



From Your Pastor

The Book of the Twelve and the Coming of the Kingdom

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"A son honors his father, and a servant his master.

If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear?

says the LORD of hosts to you..." (Malachi 1:6)

Let me encourage the use of the *Book of the Twelve* ("Minor Prophets") for cultivating in yourself both a love and reverence for God. If you are so inclined to use this time of year to think more deeply or pointedly about your sins, and your need of repentance before the LORD, then I highly recommend reading, meditating upon, memorizing, and praying the *Book of the Twelve*. Historically, faithful Christians throughout the world have used the forty days leading up to Good Friday and Easter as a time of fasting, mourning, and weeping over sins.

As is often stated rightly by faithful Reformed (and "reforming") confessional congregations, there is nothing specifically commanded in Scripture about recognizing a time of fasting, mourning, and repentance before the time of celebrating Good Friday and Easter (there is nothing specifically commanded about celebrating Good Friday and Easter either; the only official, Biblically sanctioned Holy-Day, or Holiday is each Lord's Day—rejoice!!). But, nevertheless, you might use the present time wisely, when many in the church and the world take time both sincerely and sometimes merely culturally to think about their sins before God. You might consider using this time to consider cultivating in yourself a deeper appreciation for what the Bible does indeed command and encourage for all believers which is the fear of the LORD ("the beginning of wisdom"). And believers are specifically commanded by Holy Scripture to daily "repent", for the Kingdom of God is present in Jesus Christ. The *Book of the Twelve* can be useful by the help of the illumination and teaching of the Holy Spirit to accomplish this in the life of our congregation. In the past, the reading, meditating upon, and memorizing of the *Book of the Twelve* has lent itself to many believers in helping them to cultivate and aspire to a daily repentance.

In the Hebrew Bible, The *Book of the Twelve* is one book. As Protestants, we usually think of them as "Minor Prophets" (because their books are small compared to the other larger prophets such as Isaiah (66 chapters!), Ezekiel, and Jeremiah). The *Book of the Twelve* was inspired by the Holy Spirit specifically with the purpose to help true, believing Israel to be prepared for the coming of the LORD. These marvelous prophecies were designed by the Spirit with the purpose of bringing Israel to repentance and mourning for their sins, as they awaited the coming consummation of the Kingdom. The Holy Spirit used the *Book of the Twelve* to explain to the people why Israel had experienced the death of exile (722/ 586 BC), and to graciously hold out hope for believers of awaiting and anticipating the realization of the Abrahamic promises of restoration and resurrection when the Messianic King would come to restore all things.

In light of the glorious and gracious Abrahamic promises, how was Israel called to live before YHWH's special covenantal presence and to be both consecrated and attractive before the world in reliance upon His grace and Spirit? Moses was clear to teach the people:

ESV Deuteronomy 10:12-13: *"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹³ and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?"*

Fear

Walk

Love

Serve

Keep

= *This is true Piety/True Religion or true Fear of the LORD in both Old and New Covenants*

The Gospel produces a whole person restoration-transformation by God's grace and Spirit, that brings well-being-shalom-peace-contentment-joy-well-ordered-affections-loves in Christ: fear, walking, loving, serving, keeping, etc. whether in the Old Covenant through promises, types, and shadows, or in the New Covenant time of fulfillment. The *Book of the Twelve* was inspired to remind Israel of this righteous standard to aspire to in reliance upon His good grace in Christ. Yet many in Israel did not repent and continued in their unfaithfulness to God's covenant and committed blatant and irreverent idolatry before the face of God.

So, the *Book of the Twelve* was used by God before the coming of Christ as an instrument of judgment and discipline upon True Israel for their failure to hear and heed God's good word (given for *their good!* - Deut. 10:12-13). As a double-edged sword in the hand of YHWH, the sheep and the goats, the wheat and the chaff were separated before the coming of Christ. In fact, the results of the Spirit-wrought prophecies of the Twelve were realized in a faithful remnant awaiting Christ (such as Zechariah, Elisabeth, Joseph, Mary, Simeon, and Anna). With the coming of Christ in the fullness of the times, Jesus came to lay down His life through rejection, suffering, and death on the cross to accomplish redemption for His own *in their place for their sins* and graciously and powerfully ransoming them from slavery to sin, fear of death, and oppression of the wicked one. Thus fulfilling all of the promises of the Covenant of Grace and bringing peace-shalom with God and one another.

In other words, one might say that the word of The Twelve was the Holy Spirit's word of preparation for Good Friday and Easter. Those in Israel who truly believed and knew the LORD, prepared their hearts and received Him gladly (cf. Mal. 4:4-6). John the Baptist, as the forerunner of Jesus, and the proclaimer that the Kingdom of God had arrived in the Messiah, prepared the way for him by calling the people to repentance. John came faithfully preaching the Old Covenant truths of Moses and the Prophets, using the *Book of the Twelve* for language and imagery designed to bring folks to fear the LORD and receive the appearing of His grace in Jesus Christ. It can have the same wonderful effect on God's people today!

When Jesus Christ came the first time, he inaugurated the Kingdom like a seed that was planted through His ministry and death and resurrection and ascension, and that would gradually and progressively grow up into a great kingdom to be fully realized at His Second Coming, or Glorious Return, or Parousia (Matt. 13; Luke 8). As we await the full consummation of the Kingdom, we too, can prepare our hearts now using

the *Book of the Twelve*, so that when our Master returns he might find faith upon the earth (Luke 18:8b). That his people would be watchful and awake, faithfully serving Him, living day to day in repentance and faith, being watchful and prayerful, and eager to see Him face to face (Mark 13:35-37)! Reading, meditating upon, memorizing, and praying the *Book of the Twelve* can help us to better understand the grace of God that has appeared for sinners in Christ and the good works of faithfulness that should follow in our daily wake. As Titus 2:11-14 teaches us about fearing, walking, serving, loving, and keeping:

^{ESV} **Titus 2:11-14:** *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”*

Here are a few things about the *Book of the Twelve* that may be of interest to you if you should choose to use this as a help in learning the fear, reverence, and loving of God our Father in Christ. Biblical professor Stephen Dempster notes importantly about the *Book of the Twelve*: “When these prophetic texts are used to help to interpret the narrative storyline [of the Old Covenant] that has led to the dead end of exile in Babylon, ***instead of being regarded as books of doom and gloom they inspire hope and comfort***” (my emphasis). Let these books inspire hope and comfort to you and your family.

Below are the main themes of each of the *Book of the Twelve* so that you might have an introduction and starting point for using it to cultivate fear and reverence for God, and thus help you to daily repent and grow in grace:

HOSEA- God’s Covenant Unfailing Love – The Idolatry and Unfaithfulness of God’s People- *God’s Bride will be redeemed by grace alone.*

JOEL- The Day of the LORD – Preparation and Repentance- *True Israel will repent and live repentantly by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

AMOS- Loving God and Neighbor- *God’s king will restore and unite God’s people and teach them righteousness.*

OBADIAH- God’s Sovereign Purpose in History- *God will come in justice, wrath, and salvation for those awaiting Him.*

JONAH- God’s Mercy to the Nations- *Let us rejoice of our unworthiness and evangelize others with the good news of God’s mercy in Christ for the chief of sinners!*

MICAH- God’s Justice and Mercy- *Let us repent and enjoy God’s favor as we anticipate the Shepherd-King from Bethlehem.*

NAHUM- God’s Patience and Wrath- *Let us repent and enjoy God’s favor.*

HABAKKUK- “The Just Shall Live by Faith”- *Though he slay me, yet will I trust Him.*

ZEPHANIAH- The Wrath of God on the Day of the LORD and the restoration of God’s people. *“He rejoices over me! I shall not fear!”*

HAGGAI- Rebuilding the Temple of the LORD-Glory will return- *“He is coming!”*

ZECHARIAH- Eschatological Hope and Glory- *“Mine eyes shall see the glory in the face of Jesus!”*

MALACHI- God’s Covenantal Faithfulness- *“Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!”*

In an effort to live repentantly and more sincerely reverent before our loving God, you might use these themes in this way (in private devotions, with your family, in bible studies, etc). You might start with Hosea, thanking God that He is your covenant LORD full of steadfast love and mercy who has committed Himself to you by His good and kind promise, and that in light of His goodness and grace, you desire to see Him as your Redeemer, Lord, and Bridegroom. That you desire to repent of how unfaithfully and idolatrously you have lived, and how you desire/aspire to more of a holy, pure, undistracted, fuller love for Him as His Holy Bride. Then you might go to the next prophet in the Twelve, and then think through a different theme, etc. You might choose to journal this prophetic word as prayers and aspirations. Let me invite you to share with me and others in our congregation how you might be making progress, and what you are learning, and how you are seeking to live a life of repentance on a daily basis, receiving the forgiveness, growth, and good pleasure of God in Christ by His Spirit. Our congregation is a fellowship of grace!

Learning to fear the LORD and to love Him is a noble and biblical aspiration. We can only approach our Thrice-Holy God through the Lord Jesus Christ, the Mediator of His choosing for all sinners (Eph. 2:18). If cultivated by the Spirit and the Word, the fear of the LORD will help us to know God as Father, but also to recognize His claim upon our lives as LORD. As our Lord Jesus said so clearly: **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, pick up his cross daily, and follow me”** (Matt. 16:24). One way we can learn to have a great expectation of the Lord’s coming is to meditate, memorize, and pray the *Book of the Twelve*. And remember, O faithful and true Israel of God, know that your King is in your midst—a Mighty One to save you from your enemies within and without! Just as He has always promised in the Covenant of Grace, **He is with you**, your sweet and devoted “Immanuel” in Christ Jesus:

^{ESV} **Zephaniah 3:14-21:** *Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! ¹⁵ The LORD has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. ¹⁶ On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. ¹⁷ The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. ¹⁸ I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach. ¹⁹ Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. ²⁰ At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes," says the LORD.*

The LORD has set His King on Zion, His Holy Hill, at God’s right hand! (Indicative). Now serve the LORD with fear; rejoice with trembling! (Imperative). Take Gospel refuge in Him today!

^{ESV} **Psalms 2:6-12:** *"As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." ⁷ I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. ⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. ⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." ¹⁰ Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. ¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. ¹² Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*

In Christ’s love,

Pastor Biggs