

**LIVE WITH
JEHOVAH'S DAY
IN MIND**

Large-Print Edition

JEHOVAH'S DAY

... is a theme that resounds in the last 12 books of the Hebrew Scriptures. Many people are unfamiliar with those prophetic books, but in them you will find practical information that you can put to use in your daily life. Do you know how? And how can these same books help you to prepare for Jehovah's great day?



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IN MIND**

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S E C T I O N 1

GOD CAN HELP YOU PREPARE FOR HIS GREAT DAY

“The great day of Jehovah is near,” said God’s prophet. (Zephaniah 1:14) That day is fast approaching, so we need to live with it in mind. Do you realize that the so-called Minor Prophets have something important to say to you about that great day? Chapters 1 to 3 of this book will help you to become familiar with those 12 prophets and the themes of their books. Thus you can benefit from what they wrote, finding lessons that are practical for your life.

JEHOVAH'S MESSAGES FOR THEN AND NOW

OVER the years, many people have dreamed of finding buried treasures. Have you read historical accounts about explorers, archaeologists, and others who actually searched for treasures of that sort? While you might not personally go on such a search, what if you did find some treasure? How rewarding it would be if that treasure could improve your life or make it more enjoyable and successful!

² Most people never go on literal treasure hunts, but their quest for happiness may be in striving for money, good health, and a good marriage, treasures not found by digging in the earth. Nor is there any literal map showing the way to those treasures. As you know, effort is needed to attain them. That is why many are grateful for sound advice on how to reach their goals and make their life more enjoyable and successful.

1, 2. How have some sought hidden treasures, but what can help you to find enjoyment in life?

³ You actually have at hand useful advice, guidance that has already helped others to be happy. The Bible offers the best advice on living, as many have realized. English author Charles Dickens noted about the Bible: “It is the best book that ever was or will be known in the world . . . because it teaches you the best lessons by which any human creature . . . can possibly be guided.”

⁴ That observation comes as no surprise to all who view the Bible as inspired of God. You likely accept the assurance that we read at 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for setting things straight, for disciplining in righteousness.” In other words, the Bible contains very helpful information that can show people how to live amid the complexities of the world today. Those who guide their steps by the Bible can come to have a life that truly is more enjoyable and successful.

⁵ Yet, what parts of the Bible come to your mind as those where you can find that advice? Some may think

3, 4. Where can you find practical advice on how to live?

5-7. To what parts of the Bible might you turn for beneficial guidance?

of the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus offered effective counsel on aspects of daily life. Others will call to mind the apostle Paul's writings. And anyone can find helpful counsel in Psalms and Proverbs—books full of wisdom. In reality, depending on your situation or the challenges you face, any book of the Bible can prove useful, even Bible books that are mainly historical, such as the books from Joshua to Esther. The history found there contains warning lessons for everyone seeking to be happy in serving God. (1 Corinthians 10:11) Yes, those books offer advice that you can use in guiding your steps, in making your life successful. Recall this truth: "All the things that were written aforetime were written for our instruction, that through our endurance and through the comfort from the Scriptures we might have hope."—Romans 15:4; Joshua 1:8; 1 Chronicles 28:8, 9.

⁶ There is, though, a section of the Bible that for many is virtually unexplored territory where treasures may be found. This is the group of 12 books often called the Minor Prophets. These are usually found after the larger Bible books of Ezekiel and Daniel

but before Matthew's Gospel. (Most Bibles have the 12 books in this order: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.) As we have seen, the Bible is inspired of God, and it is useful for teaching and for showing people how to live. Does that include these books?

⁷ It certainly does! In fact, the so-called Minor Prophets contain riches that are really useful for showing us how to live today. For insight into why some people overlook these books, give thought to what the 12 are called in many languages: the Minor Prophets. Could that term in itself affect how people view these books? Might it have to some extent even affected your thinking?

ARE THE “MINOR PROPHETS” REALLY MINOR?

⁸ The apostle Paul began his letter to the Hebrews: “God, who long ago *spoke on many occasions* and in many ways to our forefathers *by means of the prophets*,

**8. (a) What is an important means by which God has provided direction?
(b) What are the 12 books in question often called, but what is the sense of the term?**

has at the end of these days spoken to us by means of a Son.” (Hebrews 1:1, 2) Since God was using human prophets to convey his messages, we should hardly view as “minor” any of those messengers or what they wrote. Nonetheless, the designation “Minor Prophets” has led some to view the books’ contents as minor and thus as less important. Others have concluded that the messages in these books have less authority than other Bible books. In reality, though, the name “Minor Prophets”^{*} as used in many languages relates simply to the fact that these 12 books are shorter than some others.

⁹ That a Bible book is short is no indication of its importance or value to you. The book of Ruth is much shorter than the books before and after it, yet what touching information you can find in it! That short book stresses the attachment we should have to true worship, illustrates how highly God values women,

^{*} The *Encyclopaedia Judaica* observes that this term “seems to be rooted in the Latin designation of the Vulgate (*Prophetae Minores*). The adjective ‘minor’ in the title ‘Minor Prophets’ does not reflect upon the relative importance of the 12 prophets in comparison to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, but rather upon their much smaller size.”—Volume 12, page 49.

9. Why is the length of a Bible book no indication of its relative value?

and provides vital details about Jesus' lineage. (Ruth 4:17-22) As another example, near the end of the Bible, you will find the book of Jude. It is so short that in some printed Bibles, it does not fill one page. Still, what priceless information and guidance you find in it: God's dealings with wicked angels, warnings about corrupt men infiltrating the congregation, and urgings to put up a hard fight for the faith! You can be just as sure that the books of the so-called Minor Prophets, while short, are neither minor in content nor minor in value for you.

PROPHETIC IN WHAT SENSE?

¹⁰ Another aspect to consider involves the terms “prophets” and “prophetic.” These words may bring to mind the foretelling of the future. Many people think of a prophet just as one who predicts—perhaps with mysterious wording open to interpretation—what the future holds. This affects how some view these 12 books.

¹¹ Granted, as you read these 12 books, you quickly

10, 11. (a) How might some react to the term “prophets”? (b) Biblically, who were the prophets, and what did they do?

see that they abound in predictions, many of them about the coming of the great day of Jehovah. That accords with the basic sense of the word “prophet.” A prophet was one who had an intimate relationship with God and who was often used to reveal what would come to pass. Starting with Enoch, many Bible prophets did foretell the future.—1 Samuel 3:1, 11-14; 1 Kings 17:1; Jeremiah 23:18; Acts 3:18; Jude 14, 15.

¹² We need to bear in mind, though, that the role of Jehovah’s prophets was not exclusively that of uttering divine predictions. God often used prophets as spokesmen to tell others what his will was. For instance, we may not think of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as ones who foretold the future, yet Psalm 105:9-15 classifies them as prophets. At times, God used them to reveal something future, such as when Jacob blessed his sons. But those patriarchs were also prophets in that they told their family what Jehovah said about their having a role in God’s purpose. (Genesis 20:7; 49:1-28) Another indication of the scope of the Biblical term “prophet” is the fact that Aaron served

12. How could you show that being a prophet meant more than foretelling matters?

as a prophet for Moses. Aaron carried out the role of prophet by being a spokesman, or “mouth,” for Moses.—Exodus 4:16; 7:1, 2; Luke 1:17, 76.

¹³ Think, too, of the prophets Samuel and Nathan. (2 Samuel 12:25; Acts 3:24; 13:20) Jehovah used both of them to declare what would occur in the future, but he also had them serve as prophets in other ways. As a prophet, Samuel urged the Israelites to turn from idol worship and resume pure worship. And he declared God’s judgment against King Saul, from which we can learn that Jehovah values obedience more than material sacrifices. Yes, Samuel’s being a prophet included his expressing God’s views about the right way to live. (1 Samuel 7:3, 4; 15:22) The prophet Nathan foretold that Solomon would build the temple and that his kingdom would be firmly established. (2 Samuel 7:2, 11-16) But Nathan was also acting as a prophet when he pointed out David’s sin with Bath-sheba and against Uriah. Who can forget how Nathan exposed David’s adultery—the illustration of a rich man

13, 14. (a) Illustrate that the prophets did more than make predictions. (b) How can you benefit from knowing that the prophets offered more than predictions?

who took a poor man's beloved and only lamb? Nathan also had a role in arranging true worship at God's sanctuary.—2 Samuel 12:1-7; 2 Chronicles 29:25.

¹⁴ The point is that we should not think of the messages in these prophetic books as only predictive—foretelling the future. They contain divine expressions about many other things, including excellent insights into how God's people back then were supposed to live and how we today should live. In fact, we are assured that what we find in the Bible, including these 12 books, is very useful and practical, helping people to see the best way to live. These inspired books offer us valuable guidance that can help us “to live with soundness of mind and righteousness and godly devotion amid this present system of things.”—Titus 2:12.

HOW TO BENEFIT

¹⁵ There are many ways in which we can benefit from reading God's inspired Word. Some Bible books tell us what occurred at a certain time, and others are poetic, each with unique value. In still others, the figura-

15, 16. (a) What figurative element can be found in the “Minor Prophets”? (b) What prophetic pictures are contained in those books?

tive, or symbolic, element comes to the fore, as is so with these 12 books. For example, Jesus was drawing on the book of Jonah when He said: “A wicked and adulterous generation keeps on seeking for a sign, but no sign will be given it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For just as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish three days and three nights, so the Son of man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. Men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and will condemn it; because they repented at what Jonah preached, but, look! something more than Jonah is here.”—Matthew 12:39-41.

¹⁶ Clearly, Jesus saw in the book of Jonah much more than a historical record of God’s dealings with Jonah, the prophet’s activity in Nineveh, and the result when Jonah proclaimed God’s warning message. Jesus realized that the prophet Jonah served in a figurative role, pointing to Jesus Christ, to his dying and then being raised on the third day. Furthermore, the Ninevites’ reaction offered a contrast—a contrast to how most Jews responded to Jesus’ preaching and works. (Matthew 16:4) Accordingly, we understand

that these 12 books contain prophetic pictures, or correspondencies, of God's dealings with his people in modern times. Such studies are fascinating and valuable.*

¹⁷ However, the approach of the volume you have in your hands is not a study of the figurative, or symbolic, meaning of the book of Jonah nor of the other 11 books. Neither is the approach that of a verse-by-verse analysis. Rather, the focus is primarily on information in these books that we can apply in our daily life. Ask yourself: 'In these 12 books, what useful advice or divine counsel does Jehovah provide for me? How can these books help me to "live with soundness of mind and righteousness and godly devotion amid this present system of things"? What do they tell me about Christian living, morality, family life, and attitudes in these critical days, since "the day of Jehovah is coming, for it is near"?' (Titus 2:12; Joel 2:1; 2 Timothy 3:1) As you find satisfying answers, you will likely discover verses that you will treasure, verses that

* See, for example, the treatment of Haggai and Zechariah in *Paradise Restored to Mankind—By Theocracy!* published by Jehovah's Witnesses but now out of print.

17. This volume takes what approach to the 12 books?

you have not heretofore employed when sharing Bible counsel with others. In this way, your storehouse of valuable Bible passages is certain to grow.—Luke 24:45.

¹⁸ The chapters of this volume are grouped into four sections. Try to get an overview of each section as you begin it. In each of the following 13 chapters, you will find two boxes designed to help you fix in mind what you have covered. The questions in those boxes will allow you to go over in your mind what you have read and to reflect on its value and application. The first box is located about halfway through the chapter. When you reach that box, consider the questions therein. Doing so will help you to implant deeply in your heart what you have just studied. (Matthew 13: 8, 9, 23; 15:10; Luke 2:19; 8:15) The second box will allow you to reflect on what you have read in the final part of that chapter and to secure it in your store of knowledge. So take time to study these boxes. They can truly be tools to reveal practical ways that you can benefit from what you are considering.

18. What is the arrangement of this volume, and how can you benefit from this?

BENEFITS FOR YOU

- What misconceptions about the “Minor Prophets” will you want to avoid?—Romans 15:4.
- Why can you expect to benefit from examining the 12 prophetic books?—2 Timothy 3:16.
- What can you look forward to as you consider these books?—1 Thessalonians 2:13.

¹⁹ To set the stage, so to speak, for what will follow, ask yourself what you know about the contents of each of these 12 books. Through whom did God provide these messages, and what kind of men were they? In what time periods did they live, and in what situations did they serve? (The time line on pages 26 and 27 will prove to be very helpful; consult it often as you study the subsequent chapters.) What was the immediate message or application, and how can knowing this help you to see the material in context? The following chapter will help you to answer these key questions.

19. What should you first fix in mind about the 12 books?

PROPHETS WHOSE MESSAGES CAN AFFECT US

WOULD you like to get to know 12 messengers of God? These particular 12 lived before Jesus walked the earth, so you cannot meet them face-to-face. Still, you can get to know them, noting how they kept close in mind “the great day of Jehovah.” And what you will learn is truly of significance to every Christian who is rightly striving to keep Jehovah’s great day in mind.—Zephaniah 1:14; 2 Peter 3:12.

² There are scores of men called prophets in the Scriptures—many Bible books bear the names of prophets. As with the other prophets, the 12 men we will consider are examples of faithfulness and courage. Some of them experienced the elation of seeing their message change hearts and minds, leading people back to God. Others experienced bitter disappointment when they saw wayward ones violate Jehovah’s standards and work

1. Why should you be interested in the 12 prophets who wrote the last books of the Hebrew Scriptures?

2, 3. How can we relate to the experiences of the 12 prophets?

against his will. Some of these 12 felt the frustrating effects of complacency and self-indulgence on the part of professed worshippers of Jehovah around them.

³ Like us, these 12 prophets lived in times marked by political unrest, social upheaval, and religious decline. Since they were men “with feelings like ours,” they must have had their own fears and challenges. (James 5:17) Yet, they set good examples for us, and their messages should be remembered, being recorded in the “prophetic scriptures” for the benefit of us “upon whom the ends of the systems of things have arrived.”—Romans 15:4; 16:26; 1 Corinthians 10:11.

12 PROPHETS IN THEIR TIMES

⁴ You might think that the sequence in which the books of Hosea through Malachi appear in your Bible reflects the chronological order in which these prophets lived. That is not the case. For instance, the prophets Jonah, Joel, Amos, Hosea, and Micah all lived in the ninth and eighth centuries B.C.E.* During that period,

* Compare this with the time line found on pages 26 and 27. You will see from it, for example, that both Micah and Hosea served during a period when Isaiah was a prophet of God in Jerusalem.

4. What have you noted regarding the order in which the 12 prophets lived, and which ones did Jehovah first raise up to warn and motivate his people?

many kings in both the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel were unfaithful. And their subjects followed suit, earning God's wrath. It was at this time that the Assyrians and later the Babylonians sought to attain world domination. Little did the Israelites realize that Jehovah would use these two world powers as his executioners! You are aware, though, that God had constantly alerted Israel and Judah by means of faithful prophets.

⁵ As the time for his judgment on Judah and Jerusalem drew closer, Jehovah raised up another group of forceful spokesmen. Who were in this group? The prophets Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Obadiah. They all were active during the seventh century B.C.E. The most tragic events marking that period were the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 607 B.C.E. and the exiling of the Jews. Again, it was just as God had warned in prophecies uttered by some of these very men whom he had sent to speak for him. They had tried to alert the people to things that were wrong, such as getting drunk and carrying on violence, but the

5. What group of prophets proclaimed Jehovah's judgment as Judah and Jerusalem faced desolation?

people would not change.—Habakkuk 1:2, 5-7; 2:15-17; Zephaniah 1:12, 13.

⁶ After God's people returned from exile, they needed competent leadership as well as comfort and admonition to stay focused on true worship. Another group of prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—filled that need. They served in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. As you learn more about these 12 stalwart defenders of Jehovah's sovereignty and about their work, you will discern important lessons that you can apply in your ministry during our perilous times. Let us now consider these prophets in the general order in which they served.

STRUGGLING TO RESCUE STUBBORN NATIONS

⁷ Have you ever experienced a crisis of confidence, perhaps feeling that your faith is waning? If so, **Jonah's** experiences are particularly valuable to you. Jonah lived in the ninth century B.C.E. You likely know that God assigned Jonah to go to Nineveh, the capital of

6. How did Jehovah motivate the remnant who returned from exile?

7, 8. How can Jonah's experiences encourage us to deal with any lack of confidence?

the ascending Assyrian Empire. Jonah was to denounce the wickedness of the Ninevites. However, instead of going to his assignment—about 550 miles northeast of Jerusalem—Jonah boarded a ship bound for a port that was probably in Spain. Yes, he was headed 2,200 miles in the opposite direction! What do you think? Was Jonah moved by fear, a temporary lapse of faith, or even resentment against any repentance the Ninevites might show and thereafter be able to express their aggression against Israel? The Bible does not tell us specifically. But we can see why we need to guard against letting our thinking go astray.

⁸ You know how Jonah reacted to God’s censure. When Jonah was inside “a great fish” that had swallowed him, he acknowledged: “Salvation belongs to Jehovah.” (Jonah 1:17; 2:1, 2, 9) Once miraculously rescued, Jonah carried out his commission, only to be gravely disappointed when Jehovah held back from destroying the Ninevites because they heeded Jonah’s message and repented. Jehovah again lovingly corrected the prophet, who had displayed self-centeredness. And though some might focus on Jonah’s lapses, God

counted him worthy as an obedient and faithful servant.—Luke 11:29.

⁹ Were you ever frustrated when people maligned your Bible-based message as alarmist? The message of the prophet **Joel**, whose name means “Jehovah Is God,” was viewed similarly by his countrymen. He appears to have recorded his prophecies in Judah about 820 B.C.E., in the days of King Uzziah. The services of Joel and of Jonah seem to have overlapped. Joel spoke of a plague of destructive locusts that would come in waves to desolate the land. Yes, God’s fear-inspiring day was near at hand. You will find, however, that Joel’s message was not all doom. On a positive note, he indicated that the faithful ‘would prove to be escaped ones.’ (Joel 2:32) Repentant ones can rejoice over Jehovah’s blessing and forgiveness. How reassuring it should be for us to bear in mind that this is part of our message too! Joel foretold that God’s active force, his holy spirit, would be poured out “on every sort of flesh.” Do you see how you are involved in that prophecy? And Joel stressed the only sure way of salvation: “Everyone

9. What benefits can you draw from Joel’s prophetic message?

who calls on the name of Jehovah will get away safe.”
—Joel 2:28, 32.

¹⁰ You can feel for **Amos** if you are sometimes struck by the gravity of the message we are to proclaim, usually to individuals who do not respond. Amos was neither the son of a prophet nor a part of a group of prophets; he was but a shepherd and a seasonal laborer. He prophesied during the time of King Uzziah of Judah, close to the end of the ninth century B.C.E. Despite his humble origin, Amos (whose name means “Being a Load; Carrying a Load”) carried weighty messages directed at Judah, Israel, and surrounding nations. Does it not encourage you to know that Jehovah can enable an average man to do such significant work?

¹¹ Have you ever asked yourself, ‘What sacrifices would I be willing to make to do Jehovah’s will?’ Think of **Hosea**, who lived about the time of Isaiah and Micah and who served as a prophet for some 60 years. Jehovah instructed Hosea to marry Gomer, “a wife of fornication.” (Hosea 1:2) Of the three children Gomer later bore, apparently only one was Hosea’s. Why would

10. How did Jehovah use a mere seasonal laborer?

11. To what extent was Hosea willing to go in doing God’s will?

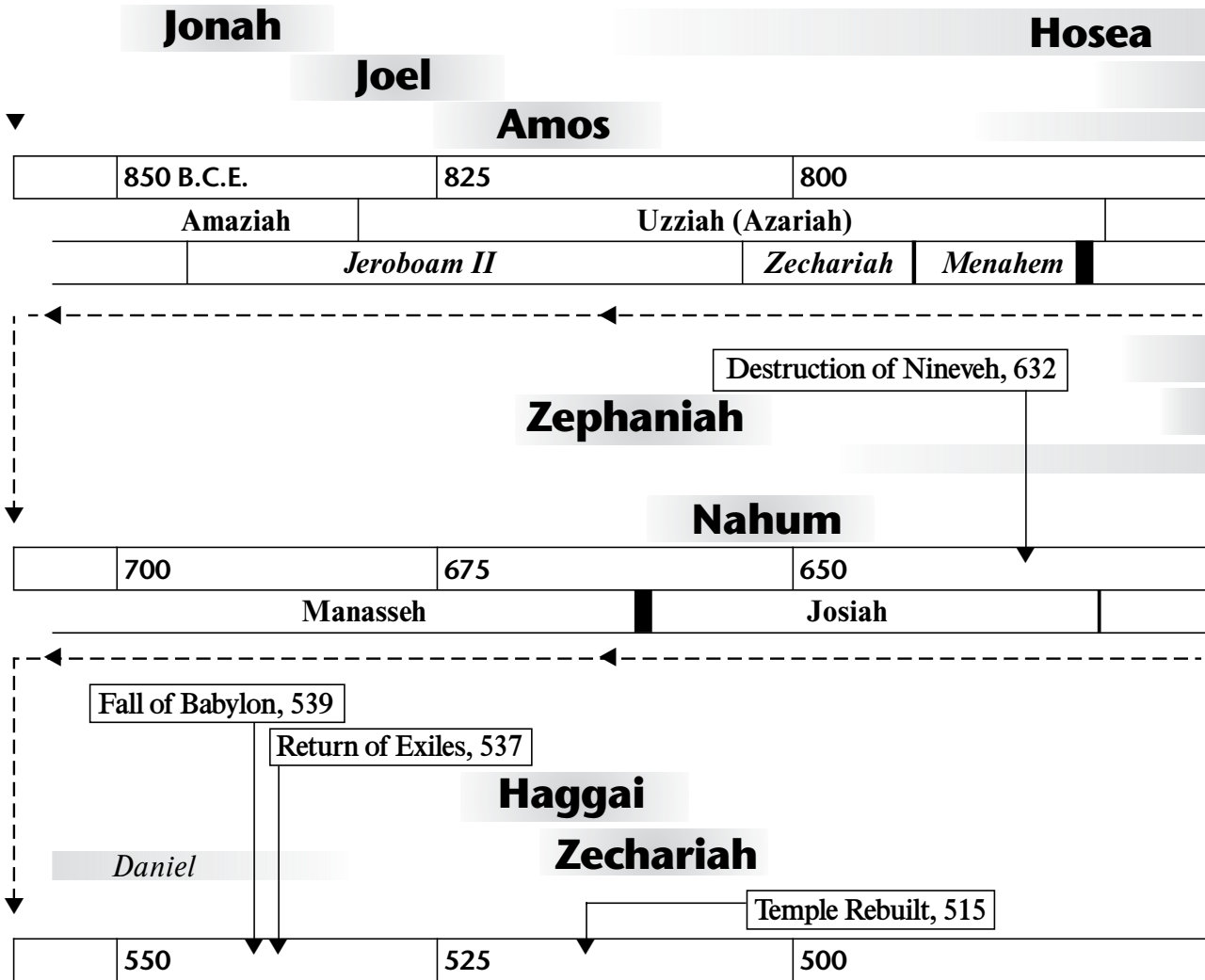
12 Prophets

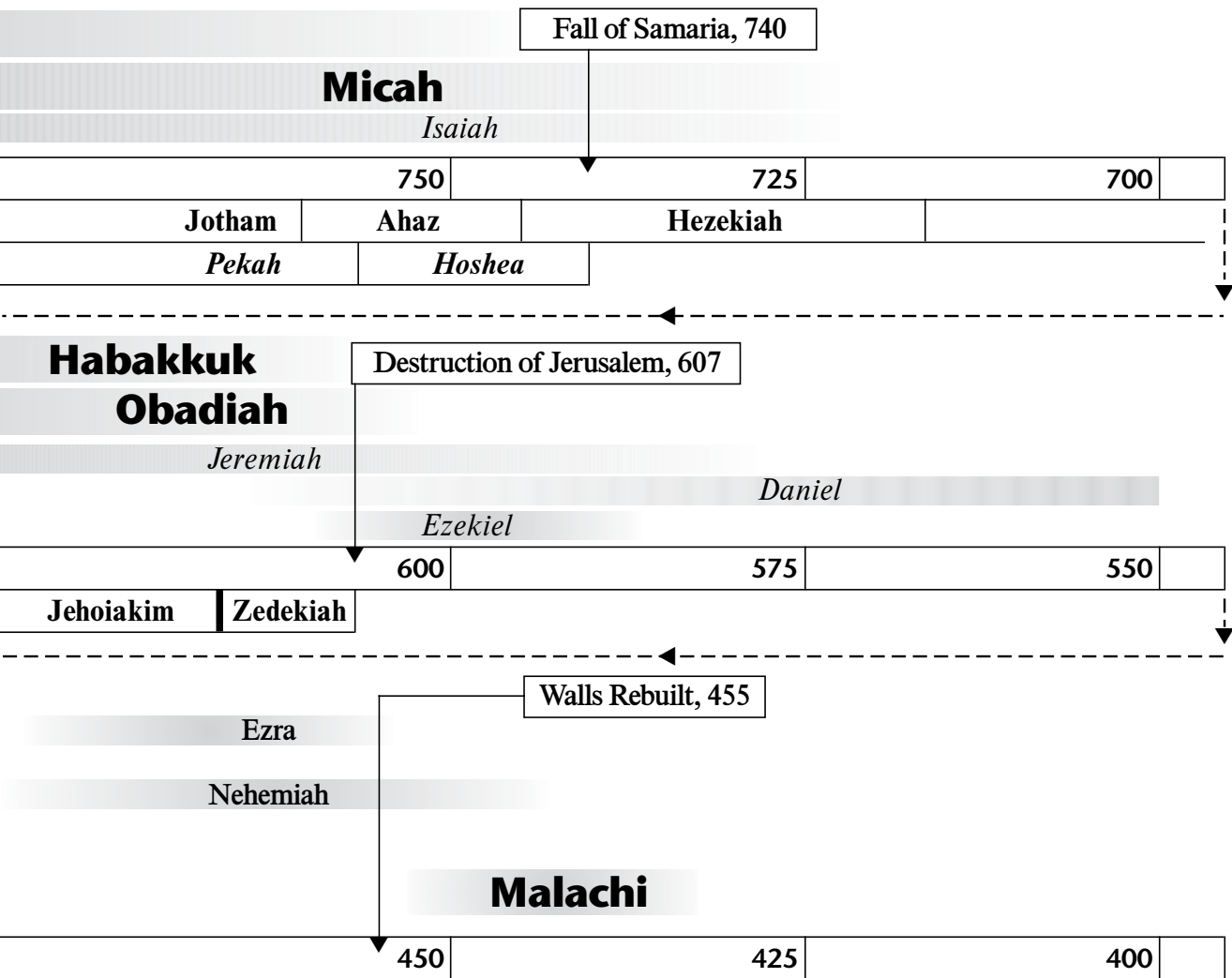
Contemporary Prophets
Other Contemporaries

Kings of Judah*

Kings of Israel*

*Kings who ruled more than two years





Jehovah ask anyone to endure the indignity of spousal infidelity? Jehovah was teaching a lesson in loyalty and forgiveness. The northern kingdom had betrayed God as an adulterous wife does her husband. Still, Jehovah would show his love for his people and try to help them repent, which certainly is heartwarming for us to consider.

¹² Do you not agree that today's critical times challenge you in developing boldness and complete reliance on Jehovah? If you manifest these qualities, you will be like **Micah**. A contemporary of Hosea and Isaiah, Micah declared messages against the nations of Judah and Israel during the reigns of Judaeen Kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, in the eighth century B.C.E. Extreme moral corruption and idolatry had defiled Israel to the north, which suffered destruction when Samaria fell to the Assyrians in 740 B.C.E. Judah wavered between obedience and unfaithfulness to Jehovah. Despite foreboding events, Micah could draw comfort in seeing his God-given message temporarily stall Judah's plunge into spiritual corruption and eventual disaster. How

12. How can you benefit from considering the example of Micah and the effects of his prophesying?

comforting it is for us to see that some do respond positively to our message of salvation!

ANTICIPATING A GATHERING STORM

¹³ As the Egyptian and the Assyrian world powers were fading, Babylon was becoming more prominent. Its ascendancy would soon have dramatic effects on the nation of Judah. God’s prophets were on hand to warn and admonish Jehovah’s worshippers. Consider some of those prophets, bearing in mind that Christians today similarly preach a warning message.

¹⁴ If you have had to break from family traditions to do Jehovah’s will, you can sympathize with **Zephaniah**. It may be that he was a great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah and a relative of King Josiah—thus a member of Judah’s royal house. Yet, Zephaniah obediently carried a message of denunciation against the corrupt leadership in Judah. His name means “Jehovah Has Concealed.” He stressed that only by God’s mercy might one “be concealed in the day of Jehovah’s anger.” (Zephaniah 2:3) Happily, Zephaniah’s courageous

13, 14. (a) How can Zephaniah’s example help you in your worship? (b) What spiritual reform did Zephaniah’s activity help bring about?

HOW CAN YOU BENEFIT?

- What have you noted about the way the 12 prophets are listed in the Bible?
- How can you benefit from the experiences of such prophets as Jonah and Amos?—Hebrews 11:32, 33, 39, 40.
- How far was Hosea willing to go in order to do Jehovah’s will?—Matthew 16:24.

proclamation bore fruit. Young King Josiah led a spiritual reform, removing the idols, repairing the temple, and restoring pure worship. (2 Kings, chapters 22-23) Zephaniah and his fellow prophets (Nahum and Jeremiah) must have been instrumental in assisting or advising the king. Sadly, most of the Jews repented only superficially. After Josiah died in battle, they returned to idolatry. Before many years had passed, they were taken into Babylonian captivity.

¹⁵ You may feel that you are of no account, not one who is in the limelight. Christians have the great privilege of being “fellow workers” of God, yet personally

15. (a) Why did Nineveh deserve the adverse message delivered by Nahum? (b) What can you learn from what happened to Nineveh?

most do not enjoy great prominence. (1 Corinthians 3:9) Similarly, we know nothing more about the prophet **Nahum** than that he was from a small town called Elkosh, possibly in Judah. His message, though, was weighty and important. How so? Nahum prophesied against the capital of the Assyrian Empire, Nineveh. Its people had responded favorably to Jonah's work, but after a while they returned to their old ways. Stone carvings from the site of ancient Nineveh show that it was, as Nahum stated, a "city of bloodshed." (Nahum 3:1) Those carvings illustrate the cruel treatment meted out to prisoners of war. In descriptive and dramatic language, Nahum foretold the complete annihilation of Nineveh. His message proved true, as will the message that we bear today.

¹⁶ Over the centuries, some Bible readers have had unfulfilled expectations regarding the day of Jehovah. Others might be frustrated by the seeming delay of God's judgment. How do you feel? **Habakkuk** expressed his understandable concerns, asking: "How long, O Jehovah, must I cry for help, and you do not 16, 17. **If our expectations about the end have not yet been fully met, what can we learn from the case of Habakkuk?**

hear? . . . Why are despoiling and violence in front of me?”—Habakkuk 1:2, 3.

¹⁷ Habakkuk prophesied during a troubled period of Judaeen history, after the reign of good King Josiah but before Jerusalem’s destruction in 607 B.C.E. Injustice and violence were rampant. Habakkuk warned that siding with Egypt would not spare Judah from the bloodthirsty Babylonians. He wrote in vibrant and dramatic style, offering the comforting thought that “as for the righteous one, by his faithfulness he will keep living.” (Habakkuk 2:4) Those words must be really important for us, since the apostle Paul quoted them in three books of the Christian Greek Scriptures. (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38) Furthermore, through Habakkuk, Jehovah offers us the assurance: “The vision is yet for the appointed time . . . It will not be late.”—Habakkuk 2:3.

¹⁸ The prophet **Obadiah** has the distinction of penning the shortest book of the Hebrew Scriptures—just 21 verses. All we know about him is that he prophesied against Edom. The Edomites descended from Jacob’s

18. Why did Jehovah direct Obadiah to prophesy against Edom?

brother, thus being the Israelites' 'brothers.' (Deuteronomy 23:7) But Edom had treated God's people in a very unbrotherly fashion. In 607 B.C.E., about when Obadiah wrote his book, they blocked the roads and handed fleeing Jews over to the enemy Babylonians. Jehovah foretold the complete desolation of Edom, a prophecy that was fulfilled. As with Nahum, we may know little about Obadiah, but how encouraging it is to realize that God can use seemingly insignificant ones as His messengers!—1 Corinthians 1:26-29.

MOTIVATING, COMFORTING, AND WARNING

¹⁹ **Haggai** is the first of three prophets who served after a faithful remnant returned from Babylonian exile in 537 B.C.E. Haggai may have been in the first group of returnees. With Governor Zerubbabel and High Priest Joshua and in cooperation with the prophet Zechariah, Haggai tried to motivate the Jews to overcome external opposition and their own apathy linked to materialism. They needed to accomplish what they had come back for: the rebuilding of Jehovah's temple. Haggai's four straightforward messages, given in 520 B.C.E.,

19. How did Haggai help to invigorate God's people?

emphasized Jehovah's name and sovereignty. As you read the book, you will find the expression "Jehovah of armies" 14 times. Haggai's forceful messages stimulated the people to resume their temple building. Are you not similarly invigorated by knowing that Jehovah has unlimited power as Sovereign Ruler and that he commands vast armies of spirit creatures?—Isaiah 1:24; Jeremiah 32:17, 18.

²⁰ You may at times be disheartened by a lack of zeal evident in some who have served God. Then you can identify with the prophet **Zechariah**. Like his contemporary Haggai, he faced the challenge of stirring up fellow worshippers to keep at the work until the temple was completed. Zechariah worked hard to strengthen the people to tackle that monumental task. In the face of the self-indulgent attitude of the people around him, he strove to stimulate strong faith and corresponding action. And he was successful. Zechariah recorded numerous prophecies about the Christ. We too can draw strength from the message that "Jehovah of armies" will not forget people who seek his favor.—Zechariah 1:3.

20. What prevailing attitude did Zechariah fight against?

IN EXPECTATION OF THE MESSIAH

²¹ The last of the 12 prophets, **Malachi**, lived up to his name, which means “My Messenger.” We know little about this prophet, who lived in the mid-fifth century B.C.E. From his prophecy, however, we do know that he was a fearless spokesman who rebuked God’s people for their sins and hypocrisy. The conditions that Malachi described are very similar to those depicted by Nehemiah, likely a contemporary of Malachi. Why was Malachi’s message sorely needed? The zeal and enthusiasm that the prophets Zechariah and Haggai had stimulated some decades earlier had faded. The Jews’ spiritual state was at a very low ebb. Malachi spoke boldly against haughty and hypocritical priests, and he criticized the people for the halfhearted worship and the sacrifices that they were offering. Yet, just as God’s Word assures us of a bright outlook for the future, Malachi foretold the coming of the Messiah’s precursor, John the Baptist, and afterward of Christ himself. Malachi’s message

21. (a) Why was Malachi’s message sorely needed? (b) With what assurance does the book of Malachi bring the Hebrew Scriptures to a close?

POINTS YOU CAN USE

- As shown in the case of Zephaniah, what effect can God’s servants have on others?
- Why is Habakkuk’s message especially applicable today?—2 Peter 3:12.
- How is Jehovah’s graciousness toward lowly ones illustrated in the case of some of the prophets?—Psalm 113:1, 6, 7; Isaiah 57:15.

closes the Hebrew Scriptures on a positive note, promising us that “the sun of righteousness will certainly shine forth” for those in fear of God’s name. —Malachi 4:2, 5, 6.

²² You can see that the men who wrote the last 12 books of the Hebrew Scriptures had faith and conviction. (Hebrews 11:32; 12:1) Their example and message can teach us valuable lessons as we eagerly look forward to “Jehovah’s day.” (2 Peter 3:10) Consider now how these prophetic messages can affect your eternal future!

22. What are your observations regarding the character and the message of the 12 prophets?

THE DAY OF JEHOVAH —A VITAL THEME

“THE great day of Jehovah is near. It is near, and there is a hurrying of it very much.” (Zephaniah 1: 14) God’s prophets time and again warned of the approaching day of Jehovah. Usually, they pointed out how its coming should affect people’s daily life, their morals, and their conduct. Urgency was always attached to their proclamations. If you had heard these messages with your own ears, how would you have reacted?

² In reading the 12 prophets, you will find that they all, directly or indirectly, spoke of the day of Jehovah.* Thus, before considering in the following chapters the valuable information that these prophets delivered, think of the recurring theme: the day of

* Both Isaiah, a contemporary of the first group of these 12 prophets, and Ezekiel, a contemporary of the second group, also warned about the day of Jehovah.—Isaiah 13:6, 9; Ezekiel 7:19; 13:5; see Chapter 2 of this book, paragraphs 4-6.

1, 2. (a) To what vital theme do all 12 prophets point? (b) How did some of the 12 prophets make direct mention of the day of Jehovah?

Jehovah. Six of the prophets directly used that expression or similar terms. Joel graphically described “the great and fear-inspiring day of Jehovah.” (Joel 1:15; 2:1, 2, 30-32) Amos told the Israelites to get ready to meet their God, for the day of Jehovah would be one of darkness. (Amos 4:12; 5:18) Later, Zephaniah spoke the words quoted in paragraph 1. And near the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, Obadiah warned: “The day of Jehovah against all the nations is near.”—Obadiah 15.

³ You will also see that two prophets who were sent to the Jews after their return from exile used similar expressions. Zechariah told of the day when all nations coming against Jerusalem would be annihilated. He described vividly what would take place on “one day that is known as belonging to Jehovah.” (Zechariah 12:9; 14:7, 12-15) And Malachi alerted God’s people to the coming of “the great and fear-inspiring day of Jehovah.”—Malachi 4:1-5.

⁴ Though not using the expression “the day of Jeho-

3. Why can we say that the prophets after the exile dealt with the topic of Jehovah’s day?

4. How do some of the 12 prophets refer to the day of Jehovah?

vah,” the others of the 12 alluded to that day. Hosea talked of Jehovah’s settling accounts with Israel and later with Judah. (Hosea 8:13, 14; 9:9; 12:2) These messages often related to what Jehovah did back in those days. For example, Jonah proclaimed God’s judgment on Nineveh, and Micah described what would happen when God acted against rebellious peoples. (Jonah 3:4; Micah 1:2-5) Nahum promised that Jehovah would take vengeance on His adversaries. (Nahum 1:2, 3) Habakkuk cried out for justice and described “the day of distress.” (Habakkuk 1:1-4, 7; 3:16) Some messages in these books definitely pointed to developments that would involve true Christians. For instance, Haggai, one of the postexilic prophets, foretold the rocking of the nations. (Haggai 2:6, 7) The apostle Paul quoted from the words of Haggai 2:6 to urge Christians to be in a fit condition when God removes the symbolic wicked heaven.—Hebrews 12:25-29; Revelation 21:1.

THE DAY OF JEHOVAH—WHAT IS IT?

⁵ You have good reason to wonder what the day of
5, 6. According to the prophets, what will the day of Jehovah be like?

Jehovah will be like. You may ask, ‘Does the day of Jehovah have any bearing on how I live now and on my future?’ As the prophets indicated, the day of Jehovah is a period when Jehovah acts against his enemies to execute judgment, a day of battle. That fear-inspiring day will likely be a day of celestial phenomena. “Sun and moon themselves will certainly become dark, and the very stars will actually withdraw their brightness.” (Joel 2:2, 11, 30, 31; 3:15; Amos 5:18; 8:9) What will happen on the earth, where we live? Micah stated: “The mountains must melt under [Jehovah], and the low plains themselves will split apart, like wax because of the fire, like waters being poured down a steep place.” (Micah 1:4) This description may be figurative, but we can conclude from it that God’s acts will bring disastrous effects on the earth and its inhabitants. Not on all humans, though. The same prophets pointed to abundant blessings for those who “search for what is good” and thus keep living.—Amos 5:14; Joel 3:17, 18; Micah 4:3, 4.

⁶ Others of the 12 prophets painted more graphic pictures of the day of Jehovah. Habakkuk vividly portrayed how Jehovah will smash “the eternal mountains” and bring low “the indefinitely lasting hills,” fitting representations of human organizations, which might seem enduring. (Habakkuk 3:6-12) Yes, the day of Jehovah “is a day of fury, a day of distress and of anguish, a day of storm and of desolation, a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick gloom.”—Zephaniah 1:14-17.

⁷ Imagine what a scourge will come upon those fighting against God! “There will be a rotting away of one’s flesh, while one is standing upon one’s feet; and one’s very eyes will rot away in their sockets, and one’s very tongue will rot away in one’s mouth.” (Zechariah 14:12) Whether this vision will be fulfilled literally or not, you can tell that it portends tragedy for many. At the very least, the tongues of God’s enemies will rot in the sense that their defiant speech will be silenced. And any vision of taking unified action against God’s people will be blurred.

7. What scourge is foretold, and how might it be fulfilled?

WHY A GOD OF LOVE ACTS

⁸ You may have heard people ask: ‘How can a loving God bring such a disaster upon his enemies? Does God have to wreak havoc on the earth? Did not Jesus urge continuing to love even enemies and thus proving to be sons of the Father in the heavens?’ (Matthew 5:44, 45) In response, you might direct attention to the very beginning of mankind’s troubles. God created the first human couple in his image and likeness—they were perfect. Yet, they introduced sin and death into the human family and thus into our life. They took sides with Satan the Devil on the issue of who has the supreme right to rule mankind. (Genesis 1:26; 3:1-19) Over the centuries, Satan has tried to prove that if humans are given an incentive to do otherwise, they will not serve Jehovah. You know that Satan has failed. Jesus Christ and many other servants of Jehovah have kept integrity to God and have shown that they serve him out of love. (Hebrews 12:1-3) Can you not think of many by name who are thus serving God loyally?

8, 9. (a) To understand why Jehovah acts against the wicked, what should you consider? (b) How is your loyalty in daily life linked to Jehovah’s taking action?

⁹ Moreover, you are involved in this issue that will end in Jehovah's eliminating wickedness. For example, as you read these 12 books, you will note that some of the prophets drew attention to the luxurious lifestyle of people who were neglecting the worship of Jehovah. The prophets admonished God's people to 'set their heart upon their ways' and to transform their lives. (Haggai 1:2-5; 2:15, 18; Amos 3:14, 15; 5:4-6) Yes, the prophets were showing the people how to live. Those who accepted that exhortation showed that Jehovah is their Sovereign, thereby proving Satan a liar. Jehovah will prove loyal to such ones when he annihilates his enemies.—2 Samuel 22:26.

¹⁰ There is another reason for God to act. Turn your attention back to the eighth century B.C.E. when Micah prophesied in Judah. Speaking as if he were the nation, he likens the situation to a vineyard or an orchard after the harvest, with no leftover grapes or figs. That was how it was in Judaeon society, where upright ones could hardly be found. Israelites were hunting their fellow citizens, lying in wait to shed blood. Their leaders and judges were out for selfish

10. How does what Micah observed add reason for Jehovah to take action?

gain. (Micah 7:1-4) If you lived in that kind of situation, how would you feel? Likely, you would feel compassion for the innocent victims. Thus, how much more Jehovah feels for the oppressed! Today Jehovah scrutinizes mankind. What do you think he finds? Oppressors are viciously taking advantage of others and violently attacking their neighbors. As for loyal ones, they are relatively few compared with the world population. But we need not despair. Out of love for the victims, Jehovah will render justice.—Ezekiel 9:4-7.

¹¹ Clearly, Jehovah's day means destruction for his enemies and deliverance for those who fear and serve him.* Micah foretold that nations would stream to the mountain of Jehovah's house, resulting in worldwide peace and unity. (Micah 4:1-4) Back in that time, did the fact that the prophets were proclaiming the day of Jehovah make any difference in people's lives? For some, it did. Recall that when Jonah proclaimed a judgment against Nineveh, the violent,

* For additional evidence of this positive aspect, please read Hosea 6:1; Joel 2:32; Obadiah 17; Nahum 1:15; Habakkuk 3:18, 19; Zephaniah 2:2, 3; Haggai 2:7; Zechariah 12:8, 9; and Malachi 4:2.

11. (a) The day of Jehovah means what to those who fear him? (b) How did Jonah's warning message affect the Ninevites?

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

- To what vital topic do all 12 prophets make reference?—Joel 1:15; Zephaniah 1:7, 14.
- What will the day of Jehovah be like?—Joel 2:30, 31; Zechariah 14:12.
- Why would a loving God take action against the wicked, as if on one day?—Micah 7:2-4; Hebrews 12:1-3.

wicked inhabitants of that city “began to put faith in God” and “turned back from their bad way.” As a result, Jehovah refrained from causing calamity then. (Jonah 3:5, 10) The message about the impending day of Jehovah’s judgment did affect the lives of the Ninevites!

HOW DOES THAT DAY AFFECT YOU?

¹² ‘But those prophets lived centuries ago,’ someone might object. ‘What do their messages about Jehovah’s day have to do with me?’ Granted, those prophets lived many years even before Jesus’ birth, **12, 13. (a) About whom did the 12 prophesy? (b) Why can we say that the prophetic words of the 12 pointed considerably forward in time?**

yet we should consider how their words about Jehovah's day are relevant in the 21st century. What practical benefits can we derive from what they said about Jehovah's great day? There is a key to seeing the relevance and benefiting from their message. It is our recognizing that the prophets warned of Jehovah's day against Israel, Judah, surrounding nations, and certain world powers of the day.* The point is that such prophecies were fulfilled! The Assyrians did invade Samaria, Judah was desolated in 607 B.C.E., and the surrounding hostile nations were soon devastated. Eventually, the Assyrian and Babylonian world powers fell, all in fulfillment of specific prophecies.

¹³ Now turn your thoughts to the day of Pentecost 33 C.E., long after many of those prophecies saw their first fulfillments. On that day, the apostle Peter applied Joel's prophecy to the pouring out of God's holy spirit. Then Peter quoted from the book of Joel: "The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and illustrious day of Jehovah arrives." (Acts 2:20) This shows that there

* Some of the 12 prophesied against, not just one nation, but a number of nations.

would be still further fulfillments of the prophecies about the day of Jehovah. As for Joel's prophecy, it had a second fulfillment in 70 C.E. when the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem, certainly a time of darkness and blood.

¹⁴ However, Joel's prophecy and other prophecies about the day of Jehovah are yet to have a final fulfillment, which applies to us living in the 21st century. How so? Peter admonished Christians to keep "close in mind the presence of the day of Jehovah." The apostle went on to say: "There are new heavens and a new earth that we are awaiting according to his promise, and in these righteousness is to dwell." (2 Peter 3:12, 13) No new heavens (a new theocratic government) with a new earth (a society of righteous people under that government) was established right after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. So the prophetic words about the day of Jehovah must have another fulfillment. Yes, these prophecies concern us today, who are living in "critical times"!—2 Timothy 3:1.

14, 15. (a) Why can we say that the prophecies about the day of Jehovah concern us today? (b) When can we expect the day of Jehovah to take place?

¹⁵ The combined description of Jehovah's day as presented in these 12 Bible books makes us think of Jesus Christ's words: "There will be great tribulation such as has not occurred since the world's beginning until now, no, nor will occur again." He said that "immediately after" the beginning of that great tribulation, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken." (Matthew 24:21, 29) This helps us to pinpoint the timing of the day of Jehovah. It is just ahead. The Scriptures indicate that the great tribulation will destroy "Babylon the Great," the world empire of false religion. Then, as the climax of the great tribulation, Jehovah's day will wipe God's enemies off the face of the earth. —Revelation 17:5, 12-18; 19:11-21.

¹⁶ Jehovah's Witnesses have discerned the nature of fulfillments of prophecies about Jehovah's day. Often and in various ways, apostate Jerusalem, renegade Samaria, the hostile Edomites, the violent Assyrians, and the Babylonians prefigured aspects of false reli-

16. In what major way will prophecies about the day of Jehovah be fulfilled?

gion. All such religion will be destroyed in the initial phase of the great tribulation. In the following “great and fear-inspiring day of Jehovah,” her political and commercial lovers will meet their end.—Joel 2:31.

PROVE YOURSELVES READY

¹⁷ Because the judgment messages apply mainly to false religion, some Christians might feel that they will not be affected by the fulfillment of these prophecies. However, what Amos told the Israelites has practical value to all: “Woe to those who are craving the day of Jehovah!” Some Israelites in Amos’ day thought that Jehovah’s day would mean only blessings for them, believing that it would be the day when God acts for his people. They even craved that day! To self-conceited ones, though, the day of Jehovah would “be darkness, and no light,” Amos continued. Yes, those Israelites were on the receiving end of Jehovah’s wrath!—Amos 5:18.

¹⁸ Amos then described what would happen to those

17, 18. (a) Why did Amos pronounce woe on those who were “craving the day of Jehovah”? (b) What would happen to those unprepared for the day of Jehovah?

who were craving the day of Jehovah. Think of a man who flees from a lion and ends up meeting a bear. Running away from the bear, he takes refuge in a house. Panting for breath, he closes the door behind him and leans on the wall, only to be bitten by a snake. In a way, that is the destiny of the ones who are not really ready for the day of Jehovah.—Amos 5:19.

¹⁹ Do you see the practical value this account might have for you? Recall that Amos was directing his words to people who were in a dedicated relationship with God. Still, there were things about their actions and attitudes that needed adjustment. Is it not worthwhile to examine your life to see whether you are proving yourself ready for that vital day or whether some adjustments are in order? How can you prove that you really are ready? Obviously, it is not by building a shelter, storing basic food items, learning how to purify water, or stockpiling gold coins, as some survivalists have done. “Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them in the day

19. In what practical ways should we prepare for the day of Jehovah?

of Jehovah’s fury,” says Zephaniah. So being ready would not depend on the storing up of material items. (Zephaniah 1:18; Proverbs 11:4; Ezekiel 7:19) Rather, we have to be alert spiritually and live day by day as ones who are ready. We need the right attitude—and actions to match. Micah said: “As for me, it is for Jehovah that I shall keep on the lookout. I will show a waiting attitude for the God of my salvation.”—Micah 7:7.

²⁰ If you have this waiting attitude, you will give evidence that you are ready, on the lookout for the day of Jehovah. You will not be concerned about the date on which that day may come or how long you have waited for it. All the prophecies regarding that day will be fulfilled in Jehovah’s due time and will not be delayed. Jehovah told Habakkuk: “The vision is yet for the appointed time, and it keeps panting on to the end, and it will not tell a lie. Even if it should delay [from a human standpoint], keep in expectation of it; for it will without fail come true. It will not be late [from Jehovah’s viewpoint].”—Habakkuk 2:3.

20. What factors do not alter our waiting attitude?

²¹ In this book, you will learn how you can show a waiting attitude for the God of salvation. What benefits can you expect? Well, the focus will be on a part of the Bible that may be somewhat unfamiliar to you—the 12 so-called Minor Prophets. Hence, there will be stimulating insights. For example, in Section 2, you will consider how to “search for Jehovah” and keep living. (Amos 5:4, 6) Based on these 12 books, you might discern how to get to know Jehovah better and sharpen your view of serving him, even in expanded ways. With help from these prophets, you will doubtless deepen your understanding of his personality. In Section 3, you will see more clearly what Jehovah expects of you in your dealings with your family members and others. That can help you to be ready for his great day. Finally, in Section 4, you will look into the prophets’ advice on what your attitude should be as Jehovah’s day draws nearer, learning, too, how your Christian ministry may be impacted. No doubt, you will be thrilled as you consider the prophets’ message about what your future can be like.

21. How can you benefit from what is to come in this book?

BENEFITS FOR YOU

- How may the day of Jehovah affect you?—Acts 2:19, 20; 2 Peter 3:13.
- When can you expect the day of Jehovah to occur?—Matthew 24:21, 29.
- How can you prove yourself ready for Jehovah’s day?—Amos 5:4, 6; Habakkuk 2:3.

²² Do you recall the urgent words of Zephaniah quoted at the outset of this chapter? (Zephaniah 1:14) His message affected the life of young King Josiah. When he was but 16 years of age, Josiah started to seek Jehovah. When he turned 20, he set out on a campaign against idol worship, in line with Zephaniah’s encouragement to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 34:1-8; Zephaniah 1:3-6) Has the warning about the day of Jehovah touched your daily life as much as it did Josiah’s? Let us see how the 12 prophets can help each one of us.

22. How would you like to respond to the advice found in the books of the 12 prophets?

S E C T I O N 2

KNOW JEHOVAH AND SERVE HIM

What do the books of the 12 prophets contain that makes us want to know Jehovah even better? Why are Jehovah's messages that those prophets delivered so useful now? As you consider Chapters 4 to 7 of this book, you will find indications of how you should be worshipping God and applying his standards. For example, how does he expect you to display justice in your dealings? Yes, you will find that these 12 prophetic books can improve your life today.

JEHOVAH—THE GOD WHO FORETELLS AND FULFILLS

MANY people feel that their life is spinning out of control. And from news reports they have read, they conclude that the whole human race is on a downward spiral. Efforts to remedy the world's ills seem merely to complicate a hopeless situation. It is noteworthy that some of the 12 prophets that we are considering faced comparable concerns, and they provided messages of hope that we ourselves can benefit from and that we can use in comforting others.—Micah 3:1-3; Habakkuk 1:1-4.

² A central idea that you will find in these prophetic books is that Jehovah, the Sovereign of the universe, is in full control of human affairs and is keenly interested in our welfare. In fact, each of us can say, “He is interested in *my* welfare.” The 12 prophets paint an appealing portrait of “Jehovah of armies.”

1, 2. (a) Why might some feel that no one is in control? (b) How do the 12 prophets portray Jehovah's personality?

God can ‘touch the land, so that it melts,’ yet he assures his people: “He that is touching you is touching my eyeball.” (Zechariah 2:8; Amos 4:13; 9:5) Does it not warm your heart to read passages that illustrate how God’s dealings are governed by love and how he manifests mercy and forgiveness? (Hosea 6:1-3; Joel 2:12-14) Granted, the writings of these prophets do not explore every aspect of God’s personality; all 66 books of the Bible are needed for that. Still, these 12 provide an excellent window through which we can see God’s appealing personality and his dealings.

³ The writings of the 12 prophets can reinforce our confidence in Jehovah’s trustworthiness as the Foreteller of the future and the unfailing Fulfiller of his purpose. They confirm that he will ultimately bring about an earthly paradise under divine rulership. (Micah 4:1-4) Some of those prophets describe how Jehovah prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah and for the ransom that would free mankind from sin and death. (Malachi 3:1; 4:5) Why is knowing all of this vital?

3. How is it made evident by the 12 prophets that Jehovah is a God of purpose?

A LOVING SOVEREIGN IN FULL CONTROL

⁴ Remember the challenge hurled against God regarding his right to rule, as discussed in the preceding chapter. Rebellion against Jehovah's authority—and suspicion as to his motives—led some in heaven to disobey God and wreak havoc on earth. So it is clear that respect for and submission to Jehovah's sovereignty are necessary for full order in the universe and for peace among humans. Therefore, Jehovah is rightly determined to vindicate his sovereignty. Let us review how the 12 prophetic books can help us to see this more clearly.

⁵ As Jehovah's messengers, the prophets stressed his exalted position. For instance, in magnifying the name and sovereignty of the Almighty, Amos uses the designation "Sovereign Lord" 21 times. This shows that the true God is infinitely great and that nothing is beyond his reach. (Amos 9:2-5; see the box "Jehovah the Almighty.") Jehovah is the only rightful Sovereign of the universe, incomparably superior to lifeless idols. (Micah 1:7; Habakkuk 2:18-20; Zephaniah

4, 5. (a) What fundamental truth about God do the 12 prophets stress? (b) How are you affected by Jehovah's almightiness?

JEHOVAH THE ALMIGHTY

A title for God in Hebrew is *Shad-dai'*, or “the Almighty One.” This term is found once in the 12 prophetic books, at Joel 1:15. It has been suggested that its primary meaning is “be strong” or “act strongly.” A similar expression, ‘Jehovah of armies,’ is found 107 times in the 12 books. Might implies strength or power to accomplish a thing purposed. It also denotes overcoming obstacles or opposition. Jehovah’s almightiness involves his irresistible power to accomplish his purpose, to fulfill what he foretells.

2:11) Jehovah’s position as the Maker of all things gives him the inherent right to exercise sovereign power over all. (Amos 4:13; 5:8, 9; 9:6) Why is that important to you?

⁶ If you have ever suffered discrimination, injustice, or prejudice, take comfort in knowing that the loving Sovereign cares for *all*. Jehovah had a special relationship with one ancient nation, yet he announced his determination to benefit people of all nations and

6. How is every human involved in the fulfillment of God’s purpose?

languages. He is “the true Lord of the whole earth.” (Micah 4:13) God promised that his name “will be great among the nations.” (Malachi 1:11) As our heavenly Father impartially makes himself known, “men out of all the languages of the nations” eagerly respond to his invitation to become his worshippers. —Zechariah 8:23.

⁷ Knowledge of what God is like and what he will do is closely linked to his name. (Psalm 9:10) When Micah lived, Jehovah’s name was maligned because many bearing His name were grossly disobedient. The prophet was inspired to stress “the superiority of the name of Jehovah” and to point out that “the person of practical wisdom will fear [God’s] name.” (Micah 5:4; 6:9) Why? Any reliable hope that you have for an enduring future involves the rich meaning of that name: “He Causes to Become.” Why not read Joel 2:26 and think about how pleased you can be to bear that name and to tell others about the one God who can become whatever he needs to become for the benefit of all his creatures? God has proved to be the one

7. Why is the meaning of Jehovah’s name significant?

with unlimited ability to make things happen. You can find evidence of that in the fulfillment of scores of prophecies proclaimed by the 12 prophets.

⁸ Millions have been affected positively by learning that Jehovah can cause to be done or fulfilled whatever he chooses. Joel indicated that in the famous words quoted by Christian writers: “Everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will get away safe.” (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13) Do we see ourselves in Micah’s affirmation, namely, that “we, for our part, shall walk in the name of Jehovah our God to time indefinite, even forever”? (Micah 4:5) Yes, during periods of persecution or in times of personal distress, we can confidently “take refuge in the name of Jehovah.”—Zephaniah 3:9, 12; Nahum 1:7.

⁹ As you read these prophetic books, you can reaffirm your conviction that Jehovah has control even over human rulers and powerful decision makers. He has the ability to move them to act in harmony with his will. (Proverbs 21:1) Consider the case of Darius the Great of Persia. Enemies of true worship sought

8. In what ways has Jehovah’s name motivated you?

9. How extensive is God’s control over human rulers?

HOW IS YOUR FAITH STRENGTHENED

- by Jehovah’s almightiness?—Joel 1:15.
- by God’s impartiality?—Zechariah 8:23.
- by the rich meaning of God’s name?
—Micah 5:4.

his help to stop the rebuilding of Jehovah’s temple in Jerusalem. Exactly the opposite happened! About 520 B.C.E., Darius revived Cyrus’ decree and supported the Jews’ building work. When further obstacles came along, God’s message to Jewish Governor Zerubbabel was: “‘Not by a military force, nor by power, but by my spirit,’ Jehovah of armies has said. Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become a level land.” (Zechariah 4:6, 7) No obstacle will block Jehovah’s destruction of this wicked system of things and his establishing of a paradise for his worshippers to enjoy.—Isaiah 65:21-23.

¹⁰ Consider also that Jehovah controls the forces of nature, which he can use to destroy his enemies if he

10. How far-reaching is God’s control, and why is that noteworthy?

chooses to do so. (Nahum 1:3-6) Emphasizing how Jehovah can protect his people, Zechariah used figurative language: “Over them Jehovah himself will be seen, and his arrow will certainly go forth just like lightning. And on the horn the Sovereign Lord Jehovah himself will blow, and he will certainly go with the windstorms of the south.” (Zechariah 9:14) Will it, then, be difficult for God to prove his supremacy over ungodly nations in our time? Not at all!—Amos 1:3-5; 2:1-3.

A RELIABLE KEEPER OF PROMISES

¹¹ Imagine that you lived during the ninth century B.C.E. in what is now known as the Middle East. Which great city would you probably have heard about? Nineveh, of course. It was a prominent Assyrian city on the east bank of the Tigris River, about 550 miles northeast of Jerusalem. Reports might have reached you about its impressive size—some 60 miles in circumference! People who visited Nineveh said that it rivaled Babylon for splendor, with royal pal-

11, 12. (a) Why was Nineveh considered invincible? (b) How did things turn out for Nineveh, in line with God’s prophetic word?

aces, temples, broad streets, public gardens, and an impressive library. What is more, military strategists spoke of its massive, impenetrable outer and inner walls.

¹² “Invincible!” Many people must have said that in describing Nineveh. But some prophets from the tiny nation of Judah insisted that Jehovah had condemned to destruction that “city of bloodshed.” As a result of the people’s response to Jonah’s message, the city was for a time spared God’s judgment. However, the Ninevites returned to their old wicked ways. Nahum foretold: “Nineveh . . . , a sword will cut you off . . . There is no relief for your catastrophe.” (Nahum 3:1, 7, 15, 19; Jonah 3:5-10) About that same time, God used Zephaniah to foretell that Nineveh would become a desolate waste. (Zephaniah 2:13) Would the invincible political reality of the day be overturned in fulfillment of Jehovah’s word? The answer came in about 632 B.C.E. when the Babylonians, Scythians, and Medes besieged Nineveh. Sudden floods eroded its walls, and the attackers penetrated its defenses.

(Nahum 2:6-8) The once mighty city quickly became a mound of ruins. To this day Nineveh remains desolated.* “The exultant city” was not able to stand in the way of the fulfillment of God’s word!—Zephaniah 2:15.

¹³ What happened to Nineveh is but one example of prophecy fulfilled. Look at a modern map of the Middle East. Can you find Ammon, Assyria, Babylon, Edom, or Moab? Hardly! Despite the fact that at one time such nations were prominent, the 12 prophets foretold their demise. (Amos 2:1-3; Obadiah 1, 8; Nahum 3:18; Zephaniah 2:8-11; Zechariah 2:7-9) One by one those nations disappeared as distinct entities. Jehovah said that they would vanish, and they did! And what these prophets foretold about a remnant of Jews returning from captivity in Babylon was fulfilled—it happened!

* In November 2002, before the war in Iraq, Professor Dan Cruickshank visited the region. He reported on BBC television: “On the edge of Mosul stands the vast ruined city of Nineveh, which—along with Nimrud . . . was enthusiastically excavated by British archaeologists from the 1840s onwards. . . . The exploration of these Assyrian cities meant no less than the discovery of a long lost—almost mythical—civilisation that was known only from brief, enigmatic and far from flattering descriptions in the Bible.”

13. What evidence of fulfilled prophecies can you find in the 12 prophets?

¹⁴ How is your confidence affected by such evidence of Jehovah’s prophetic ability? You can be certain that Jehovah will keep his promises; he is the God “who cannot lie.” (Titus 1:2) Furthermore, through his Word, God informs us of what we need to know. You can build your life around the doing of Jehovah’s will and the surety of his prophetic words. The prophecies in the 12 books are not mere examples of predictions fulfilled in the past. Many of the prophecies are now in the course of fulfillment or are soon to be realized. Thus, the record in these 12 books can strengthen your confidence that prophecies about our time and the future will be fulfilled. Take them seriously.

A FATHER WHO CARES

¹⁵ God’s trustworthiness involves more than what will happen to nations or on the overall world scene. Jehovah foretells and fulfills in ways that can touch you personally. How so? Well, you may sometimes struggle to handle personal issues. You realize

14. Why can you confidently build your life around Jehovah’s promises?

15. When you struggle with personal issues, how can Micah’s experiences help you?

that it is not just a matter of finding someone who understands—you need to find someone whom you can trust to help you. In the eighth century B.C.E., Micah must have felt quite lonely as he faced the proud people of Judah. It may have seemed that he was the last faithful person on earth, that he could not trust even his family. Wherever he turned, he found bloodthirsty, deceitful, and corrupt people. Nevertheless, Micah was reassured by God's promises to take care of His faithful ones no matter what others might do. You too can take comfort in that, especially if as a worshipper of Jehovah, you find yourself in the minority or alone, surrounded by those who do not honor God.—Micah 7:2-9.

¹⁶ As is often the case today, the wealthy and the powerful in Judah and Israel became greedy and unfair. Illegal slavery was the result of overtaxation and land grabbing. The poor were treated with indifference, even cruelty. (Amos 2:6; 5:11, 12; Micah 2:1, 2; 3:9-12; Habakkuk 1:4) Through his messengers, God made it clear that he does not tolerate corruption and

16. Why can you be sure that God takes note of corruption and oppression and will deliver the righteous?

oppression and that he will punish persistent wrongdoers. (Habakkuk 2:3, 6-16) He foretells that he will “set matters straight respecting mighty nations” and that his approved servants “will actually sit, each one under his vine and under his fig tree, and there will be no one making them tremble.” (Micah 4:3, 4) Imagine the resulting relief! God has foretold and then fulfilled many other things. Can you not be sure that this promise too will be fulfilled?

¹⁷ Jehovah does not fulfill his promises simply to show his ability to predict, as if to impress humans. His actions spring from principled love, for “God is love.” (1 John 4:8) Call to mind the case of Hosea, who lived in the eighth century B.C.E. As Hosea’s wife, Gomer, was unfaithful to him, so the Israelites were unfaithful to Jehovah. Their idolatry was like adultery; they mixed Baal worship with the pure worship of Jehovah. They also figuratively “committed fornication” with Assyria and Egypt. How would Jehovah react? Hosea was to pursue his unfaithful wife to bring her back. Jehovah pursued his people, out of

17, 18. (a) Why does God hold out hope for people? (b) How should we view Jehovah’s discipline?

love. “With the ropes of earthling man I kept drawing them, with the cords of love, . . . and gently I brought food to each one.” (Hosea 2:5; 11:4) If they would respond with sincere repentance, they could experience God’s forgiveness, making restored relations with him possible. (Hosea 1:3, 4; 2:16, 23; 6:1-3; 14:4) Are you not moved when you note Jehovah’s affection? Ask yourself, ‘If Jehovah showed such affection in the past, can I not be sure of his love, his tender, loyal, unchanging, and undying affection?’ —Hosea 11:8.

¹⁸ The 12 prophetic books can also help you to see that God’s love may include correction. Jehovah assured his errant people that he would “not completely annihilate” them. (Amos 9:8) When punishment was necessary, God did not withhold such, but what a relief it should have been to know that his punishment would be temporary! Malachi 1:6 likens Jehovah to a loving father. You know that a father may discipline his beloved children in order to correct them. (Nahum 1:3; Hebrews 12:6) Yet, our heavenly Father’s love makes him slow to anger, and Malachi

3:10, 16 confirms that he will generously reward his servants.

¹⁹ Malachi begins his book with the assurance: “‘I have loved you people,’ Jehovah has said.” (Malachi 1:2) As you reflect on that divine assurance to Israel, ask yourself: ‘Am I doing anything that may hinder me from enjoying God’s love? What is there about God’s love that I want to know and experience more fully?’ By deeply sensing God’s love, you can be increasingly assured of his eternal affection.

FORGIVENESS OPENS THE WAY TO SALVATION

²⁰ In reading these prophetic books, you will note that sometimes Jehovah foretold calamities. Why? Often, it was to move his people to repent. To that end, he allowed foreigners to destroy Samaria in 740 B.C.E. and Jerusalem in 607 B.C.E. What God foretold was fulfilled, but later he allowed repentant ones to be restored to their land. Yes, these books stress that God graciously forgives and restores those who turn from sin and come to him. (Habakkuk 3:13;

19. What self-examination is appropriate?

20. How does divine forgiveness open the way to salvation?

Zephaniah 2:2, 3) Micah was moved to proclaim: “Who is a God like you, one pardoning error and passing over transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? He will certainly not hold onto his anger forever, for he is delighting in loving-kindness.” (Micah 7:18; Joel 2:13; Zechariah 1:4) The fulfillment of prophecy confirms that.

²¹ As to a permanent legal basis for lasting forgiveness, Jehovah foretold the coming of the Messiah, who would sacrifice his human life as “a corresponding ransom” for sinful mankind. (1 Timothy 2:6) Amos pointed to a restoration that the Messiah, the son of David, would bring about. (Amos 9:11, 12; Acts 15:15-19) Micah even pointed out the very birthplace of Jesus, the one to appear with life-giving benefits for all who would exercise faith in His sacrifice. (Micah 5:2) And Zechariah spoke about the “Sprout,” Jesus, who would “sit down and rule on his throne.” (Zechariah 3:8; 6:12, 13; Luke 1:32, 33) Your faith will undoubtedly be strengthened by examining more

21. (a) What did the 12 prophets indicate about the Messiah? (b) What Messianic prophecies do you find interesting?

MAJOR PROPHECIES ABOUT THE MESSIAH

Prophecy	Found at	Fulfillment
Born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2	Luke 2:4-11; John 7:42
Called out of refuge in Egypt	Hosea 11:1	Matthew 2:14, 15
Entered Jerusalem on an ass	Zechariah 9:9	Matthew 21:1-9; John 12:12-15
Betrayed for 30 pieces of silver	Zechariah 11:12	Matthew 26:15; 27:3-10
Shepherd struck, flock scattered	Zechariah 13:7	Matthew 26:31, 56
Pierced while on the stake	Zechariah 12:10	Matthew 27:49; John 19:34, 37
In grave parts of three days, then resurrected	Jonah 1:17; 2: 10	Matthew 12:39, 40; 16:21; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

of such prophecies.—See the box “Major Prophecies About the Messiah.”

²² As you read the messages of the 12 prophets, your confidence in God’s final victory will grow.

22. How is your confidence in Jehovah enhanced by what the 12 prophets reveal about him?

HOW CAN YOU FORTIFY YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

- by meditating on his ability to fulfill his promises?—Joel 2:11.
- by contemplating his tender love?—Hosea 11:4; 14:4; Zephaniah 3:17.
- by pondering on his mercy and forgiveness?—Hosea 2:23; Micah 7:18.

Jehovah is our Champion, and he will bring about true justice. God's word endures. He remembers his agreements with his people, cares for his servants, and delivers them from all oppressors. (Micah 7: 8-10; Zephaniah 2:6, 7) Jehovah has not changed. (Malachi 3:6) How reassuring it is to know that God faces no dilemmas or barriers as to fulfilling his purpose! When he says that his day of judgment will come, it will come. Therefore, keep on the watch for Jehovah's day! "Jehovah must become king over all the earth. In that day Jehovah will prove to be one, and his name one." (Zechariah 14:9) He foretells that; he will fulfill it.

“SEEK JEHOVAH” THROUGH WORSHIP HE APPROVES

HOW privileged you are to know the God who fulfills prophecies! You are in a position to enjoy the condition about which the prophet Hosea wrote: “I will engage you to me in faithfulness; and you will certainly know Jehovah.” Hosea was depicting a secure, paradiselike condition that God’s people would enjoy on returning from exile in Babylon. Similarly, God’s people in modern times enjoy spiritual prosperity and security; their situation is like a paradise. (Hosea 2:18-20) Now, you have come to bear God’s name as one of his dedicated servants—one of Jehovah’s Witnesses—and want to continue doing so. —Isaiah 43:10, 12; Acts 15:14.

² Ancient Israel was a nation dedicated to Jehovah, who gave them a set of precepts that no other nation had received. (Deuteronomy 4:33-35) Yet, by the end

1. What blessings are you enjoying among God’s people?

2, 3. (a) Why did Jehovah come to hate his ancient people’s way of worship? (b) Why should we consider the messages that the prophets delivered?

of the ninth century B.C.E., the Israelites' situation had changed so much that God had the prophet Amos tell them: "I have hated, I have rejected your festivals . . . If you people offer up to me whole burnt offerings, even in your gift offerings I shall find no pleasure." (Amos 5:21, 22) Whereas God is not saying such a thing to his worldwide congregation today, can you imagine how you would have felt upon hearing such an evaluation of your worship? Is there a lesson here for each one of us?

³ Back in those days, God's people claimed to be worshipping Jehovah in the way that he approved. However, many of them were serving pagan gods, such as the Canaanite Baal and the calf images, or were offering sacrifices on the high places. They were bowing down to the army of the heavens while still making oaths to Jehovah. Hence, the true God sent prophets to urge the people to return to him in pure worship. (2 Kings 17:7-17; 21:3; Amos 5:26) It is clear, then, that even for dedicated servants of God, there might be areas needing attention—actions or atti-

tudes that should be examined to be sure that these reflect worship that Jehovah approves.

“KNOWLEDGE OF GOD”

⁴ Think of the period when the earliest of the 12 prophets spoke for God. The day of Jehovah was being foretold to strike the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel. On the surface, however, an air of prosperity existed. Just as Jonah had prophesied, King Jeroboam II restored the boundary of Israel from the north toward Damascus to the Dead Sea. (2 Kings 14:24-27) Though Jeroboam did what was bad, Jehovah was long-suffering, not wanting to wipe out Israel from under the heavens. God allowed time for the Israelites to repent, to “search for Jehovah, and keep living.”—Amos 5:6.

⁵ The prosperous Israelites could have used the time to return to Jehovah by getting to know him better and pursuing what he approved. Instead, they were self-assured, feeling that ‘the calamity would not come near or reach as far as them.’ (Amos 9:10) You

4. What conditions prevailed during the reign of King Jeroboam II?

5. The Israelites’ lack of what led to rejection by Jehovah?

might say they forgot Jehovah in that “they became satisfied and their heart began to be exalted.” (Hosea 13:6) We should not feel that this is just ancient history that does not touch us. Note the reason why Jehovah had a legal case against the Israelites: “Because the knowledge is what you yourself have rejected, I shall also reject you from serving as a priest to me.” They were dedicated to Jehovah and surrounded by dedicated family members. Yet, individually they lacked true “knowledge of God.”—Hosea 4:1, 6.

⁶ It was not as if they had never heard the words of God, which Israelite parents were to consider with their children. Most had likely heard some Bible accounts from their parents, in conversation around them, or at public assemblies. (Exodus 20:4, 5; Deuteronomy 6:6-9; 31:11-13) For instance, they had heard what happened when Aaron made a golden calf while Moses was on Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 31:18–32:9) Hence, the Israelites in the prophets’ day had some knowledge of the Law

6. In what sense were the Israelites deficient in the knowledge of God?

and had heard historical accounts. Nevertheless, their knowledge was dead in that they did not let it move them to worship God in the way that *he* wanted.

⁷ You might wonder, ‘How could the Israelites be so easily lured into disobedience?’ Hosea described the process: “Israel began forgetting his Maker.” (Hosea 8:14) The form of the original Hebrew verb is well-rendered “began forgetting.” The Israelites were not suddenly suffering from amnesia about Jehovah. Rather, over time they lost sight of the importance of worshipping him in the way that he approved. Do you think that a Christian could fall into such a trap? Take, for example, a man who is serious about providing for his family. (1 Timothy 5:8) To do so, he would appropriately view his secular work as important. Perhaps something develops, and he feels that he must miss some Christian meetings in order to work. In time, missing meetings becomes easier, and he misses more frequently. Little by little, his bond with God weakens—he has ‘begun to forget his Maker.’ A similar thing may happen to a Christian whose

7. (a) How did the Israelites become disobedient so easily? (b) How can a Christian ‘begin to forget his Maker’?

parents or other relatives are unbelievers. He faces issues: How much time will he reserve for them, and when? (Exodus 20:12; Matthew 10:37) What about deciding how much time and attention to use for trips, hobbies, or entertainment?

⁸ We have studied God’s Word and put our knowledge to work. Still, each of us might consider a phrase used in the book of Amos: “cleanness of teeth.” Through Amos, God warned His people: “I also, for my part, gave you people cleanness of teeth in all your cities and want of bread in all your places.” (Amos 4:6) That cleanness was not from brushing. It was from having nothing to eat, suffering famine. Moreover, it was a warning of “a famine, not for bread, and a thirst, not for water, but for hearing the words of Jehovah.”—Amos 8:11.

⁹ Spiritually, what Amos described finds a fulfillment in the sad condition of Christendom. In contrast, “the floodgates of the heavens” are open for God’s people worldwide. They are blessed with spir-

8. In Amos’ day, what did it mean to have “cleanness of teeth”?

9, 10. (a) How might a Christian end up being spiritually famished?

(b) Why do we need to be alert to the dangers of spiritual starvation?

BY WAY OF REVIEW

- In line with the 12 prophets' message, what did God's people need to do? —Zephaniah 2:3.
- How did God's ancient people forget him?—Hosea 8:14.
- Why do Christians need to be alert even while living amid spiritual plenty? —Amos 4:6; 8:11.

itual provisions aplenty. (Malachi 3:10; Isaiah 65:13, 14) A Christian can ask, though, 'To what extent do I personally enjoy that spiritual food?' Interestingly, some researchers have found that laboratory animals that had a damaged hunger center of the brain lost their appetite to the point that they might starve to death amid ample food! Could an individual Christian's spiritual hunger center be affected to the point that he begins to starve even though he is surrounded by ample spiritual food?

¹⁰ With your own situation in mind, consider this: Jehovah provided abundant spiritual food for the

Israelites. They had the Law, which could strengthen their relationship with him; they had a program of education to inculcate godly knowledge in their offspring; and they had prophets to help them understand God’s will. Nevertheless, they began forgetting Jehovah. The Bible says that in the days of Hosea, “they became satisfied [materially] and their heart began to be exalted.” (Hosea 13:6; Deuteronomy 8:11; 31:20) If we do not want our material situation to overshadow our bond with God, we need to be conscious of that danger daily.—Zephaniah 2:3.

TAKE NOTE OF THE WEIGHTIER MATTERS

¹¹ While Jeroboam II reigned in Israel, Uzziah (also called Azariah) ruled in Judah. He extended his territory and expanded Jerusalem. Uzziah “displayed strength to an extraordinary degree” because “the true God continued to help him.” He “kept doing what was right in Jehovah’s eyes” and “tended to search for God.” Many people in Judah, however,

11, 12. (a) During the rule of King Uzziah, why did the prophets have to encourage the people to come back to Jehovah? (b) What need did Joel highlight?

continued to make sacrificial smoke on the high places.—2 Chronicles 26:4-9.

¹² You can discern from this that although people in Judah and Israel bore God’s name, often their worship included things that he did not approve. The prophets tried to help them distinguish true worship from false. “Come back to me with all your hearts, and with fasting and with weeping and with wailing,” God pleaded through Joel. (Joel 2:12) Note: God wanted his people to come to him ‘with all their hearts.’ Yes, the problem involved their heart. (Deuteronomy 6:5) In a sense, they were going through the motions of worshipping Jehovah, yet their hearts were not fully with him. Time and again, he emphasized through the prophets the importance of loving-kindness, justice, and meekness—all of which are qualities of the heart.—Matthew 23:23.

¹³ Next, consider what took place *after* the Jews returned to their homeland. Though true worship in harmony with the Law was restored, all was not right.

13. What did the Jews who returned from exile in Babylon need to consider?

The Jews fasted on days that were anniversaries of events linked to Jerusalem's destruction. "Did you really fast to me, even me?" Jehovah asked. The desolation of that city had occurred because of divine justice, which was not something to bemoan. Instead of looking back at the past and fasting mournfully, those Jews should have been exulting, rejoicing in festival seasons because of the blessings of true worship. (Zechariah 7:3-7; 8:16, 19) And they needed to give attention to other matters. What, for example? "With true justice do your judging; and carry on with one another loving-kindness and mercies . . . and scheme out nothing bad against one another in your hearts." (Zechariah 7:9, 10) We can all benefit from what those prophets taught God's people about wholehearted worship of God.

¹⁴ What does wholehearted worship encompass? Well, what was required of God's people both before and after the exile? You know that God's standards on moral issues had to be upheld. There were also

**14. (a) The returned exiles needed to include what in their worship?
(b) How did the prophets emphasize the weightier aspects of worship?**

specific actions or activities called for in the Law, including gathering to hear and learn God’s will. In addition, though, God had his prophets stress the cultivating and displaying of loving-kindness, justice, meekness, mercy, and modesty. Notice how Jehovah emphasized these: “In loving-kindness I have taken delight, and not in sacrifice; and in the knowledge of God rather than in whole burnt offerings.” “Sow seed for yourselves in righteousness; reap in accord with loving-kindness.” (Hosea 6:6; 10:12; 12:6) Micah declared: “What is Jehovah asking back from you but to exercise justice and to love kindness and to be modest in walking with your God?” (Micah 6:6-8) And the prophet Zephaniah urged God’s people: “Seek Jehovah, all you meek ones of the earth . . . Seek righteousness, seek meekness.” (Zephaniah 2:3) Those attitudes are essential to worship that God approves.

¹⁵ What part do those attitudes play in our worship? You know that preaching the good news of the

15. In line with what the prophets admonished, what do Christians need to do in their worship?

Kingdom is vital. (Matthew 24:14; Acts 1:8) But you might ask yourself: ‘Am I inclined to view preaching in my area as a task, a burden? Or do I view it as an opportunity to help individuals who need to hear the Bible’s lifesaving message? Do I show them mercy?’ Yes, mercy and loving-kindness should motivate us to warn others of the day of Jehovah. Justice and righteousness also come into play as we try to reach all sorts of people with that message.—1 Timothy 2:4.

¹⁶ As another example, consider our obligation to attend Christian meetings, which you know are important. (Hebrews 10:24, 25) Have you thought of how that involves meekness and modesty? Meek ones are humble enough to accept instruction and then to apply what they learn, thus practicing Jehovah’s judicial decision. One who is modest, recognizing his limitations, will appreciate his need for the encouragement and the knowledge that are available through the meetings.

¹⁷ You can see from these examples how we can benefit from what the prophets taught. Yet, what if

16, 17. Why are meekness and modesty vital in your worship?

you sense the need to make adjustments in one or more of the areas mentioned above? Or what if you have made serious mistakes, memories of which bother you at times? The 12 prophets offer you comfort and help.

RETURN TO JEHOVAH

¹⁸ As we have seen, the prophets we are considering did much more than denounce and condemn. They depicted Jehovah as urging the people to come back to him. Reflect on the feeling behind Hosea's urgings: "Come, you people, and do let us return to Jehovah, for he himself has torn in pieces but he will heal us. He kept striking, but he will bind us up. . . . And we will know, we will pursue to know Jehovah." (Hosea 6:1-3) Granted, in his justice, Jehovah God executed judgment against Israel and then Judah. Still, his people should have viewed those blows as steps to restore them to spiritual health. (Hebrews 12:7-13) If Jehovah's wayward people would return, he would 'heal them' and 'bind them up.' Picture in

18. (a) For whom do the 12 prophets have an especially comforting message? (b) How do you feel about Jehovah, who pleads with people to return to him?

your mind a man kneeling to bind up the injury of his fellow. Now shift that image to Jehovah. What a merciful God Jehovah is, one who binds up those willing to return to him! Does that not move us to want to return to him if we sin against him? —Joel 2:13.

¹⁹ What does returning to God involve? Hosea reminds us of the need not just to “know” God but to “pursue to know Jehovah.” A modern reference work says concerning Hosea 6:3: “There is a marked difference between knowing about God and knowing God. It is comparable to the difference between reading about love and falling in love.” We need more than superficial knowledge about Jehovah. He must become real to us, our trusted Friend whom we can approach freely. (Jeremiah 3:4) Having such a relationship, you can sense how he feels when you act in a certain way, and that is a great help in pursuing worship that he approves.

²⁰ King Josiah was a fine example in pursuing true

19. What is involved in knowing Jehovah?

20, 21. How did King Josiah make the knowledge of God his own?

worship. Consider further his experience. By the time that Josiah became king, the nation had been ruined by the idolatry, violence, and deception that had abounded during the reigns of Manasseh and Amon. (2 Kings 21:1-6, 19-21) Zephaniah's admonition to "seek Jehovah" must have had a positive effect on Josiah, for "he started to search for the God of David." Josiah embarked on a campaign to rid Judah of idolatry, extending that effort even to what had once been territory of the northern kingdom.—Zephaniah 1:1, 14-18; 2:1-3; 3:1-4; 2 Chronicles 34:3-7.

²¹ After this cleansing, Josiah continued to seek Jehovah. He ordered temple repairs. During that work, "the book of Jehovah's law by the hand of Moses" was found, evidently the original manuscript of the Law. How did Josiah react when that book was read? "As soon as the king heard the words of the law, he *immediately* ripped his garments apart." He also 'ripped apart his heart' and promptly applied what was read. He did not try to justify himself, saying that he had already done so much. Do you recall the

result of his reform? “All his days [the sons of Israel] did not turn aside from following Jehovah the God of their forefathers.”—2 Chronicles 34:8, 14, 19, 21, 30-33; Joel 2:13.

²² ‘How would I have reacted?’ you might ask. Would you, like Josiah, have listened to the words of the prophets and made the needed changes in your actions or thinking? Although we do not live in the days of Zephaniah and Josiah, we can see the need to respond to God’s messages and counsel today. So if a Christian feels in his heart the need to adjust his way of life or worship, a consideration of the 12 prophets can serve as a personal wake-up call.—Hebrews 2:1.

²³ At times, you may feel as Jonah did when he was in the belly of the big fish: “I have been driven away from in front of your eyes! How shall I gaze again upon your holy temple?” (Jonah 2:4) Yet, how reassuring the words of Jehovah can be to us, imperfect humans prone to make mistakes! “Return to me,

22. How can we benefit from Josiah’s example?

23. If you feel that you need to improve in some area, what can you do?

HOW DO YOU FEEL?

- What is involved in wholehearted worship that Jehovah approves?—Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:8.
- If you ever feel somewhat alienated from Jehovah, how can you return to him?—Hosea 6:1-3.
- How can you imitate King Josiah in seeking Jehovah?—2 Chronicles 34:19-21; Joel 2:13.

and I will return to you.” (Malachi 3:7) If you see the need to strengthen your relationship with Jehovah, the elders in your congregation will be pleased to help you. As with driving a car, you first have to begin in low gear, so to speak. Once you are moving, progress will become easier. You can be sure that Jehovah will welcome and assist you, for he is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness.” (Joel 2:12-14) Certainly, the messages from the prophets are encouraging to all who are pursuing worship that God approves.

“LET JUSTICE ROLL FORTH” —A KEY TO KNOWING GOD

DOWN through history, there have been people who became famous for promoting justice. But consider this fact: Justice has an appeal because humans were made in God’s image. You have a personal sense of justice and want others to treat you justly because you are made in the image of Jehovah, who ‘takes delight’ in justice.—Jeremiah 9:24; Genesis 1:27; Isaiah 40:14.

² As you read various books of the Bible, you can gain insight into God’s justice. But you will be especially rewarded by examining the books of the 12 prophets. Justice is so prominent in them that an edition of Hosea, Amos, and Micah published by a Bible society is entitled *Justice Now!* Consider, for example, Amos’ urgings: “Let justice roll forth just like waters, and righteousness like a constantly flowing

1. What is behind your having a sense of justice?

2, 3. Why consider the books of the 12 prophets to learn about Jehovah’s justice?

torrent.” And note what Micah put first among your obligations: “What is Jehovah asking back from you but to exercise justice and to love kindness and to be modest in walking with your God?”—Amos 5:24; Micah 6:8.

³ Therefore, to know Jehovah better and thus to be in a position to imitate him, we certainly need to recognize his justice. Jehovah’s justice is an aspect of his very being, so we cannot say that we know him unless we appreciate his justice. Even his ancient servants knew that “Jehovah is a lover of justice.”—Psalm 33:5; 37:28.

⁴ Sometime before Jehovah executed judgment on Jerusalem, the prophet Habakkuk asked: “How long, O Jehovah, must I cry for help? . . . Law grows numb, and justice never goes forth. Because the wicked one is surrounding the righteous one, for that reason justice goes forth crooked.” (Habakkuk 1: 2, 4) Faithful Habakkuk had come to know Jehovah through the Scriptures available to him and through

4. Illustrate why the writings of the 12 prophets can strengthen your confidence in God’s justice.

his own experience. Thus, he was confident that God both upholds and encourages justice. However, the prophet was concerned about why Jehovah permits wickedness. God confirmed to Habakkuk that He would deal justly with the faithful. (Habakkuk 2:4) If Habakkuk and others could have such confidence, you have much stronger reason for having it. Why? Well, the Bible is now complete, so you can consider a more extensive record of Jehovah's dealings and expressions of his personality, including his justice. Hence, you are in a better position to know Jehovah and to be convinced of his perfect justice.

⁵ When sending messengers to Israel, Jehovah stressed being just. (Isaiah 1:17; 10:1, 2; Jeremiah 7:5-7; Ezekiel 45:9) He definitely kept that to the fore through the 12 prophets. (Amos 5:7, 12; Micah 3:9; Zechariah 8:16, 17) Anyone reading their writings can see that they call for exercising justice in one's daily affairs. There are many ways that we can apply the lessons from these 12 books, but let us examine two areas in which those prophets emphasized jus-

5. What aspect of justice is of particular interest now?

tice and then see how we can put what we learn into practice.

JUSTICE IN BUSINESS AND IN MONEY MATTERS

⁶ Jesus said: “Man must not live by bread alone.” (Luke 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3) He did not deny that we need bread—we need to eat. For most, that means working or having someone in the family work to put food on the table. That was also true of God’s ancient servants. Some were self-employed—raising crops or making such products as clothing, furniture, or cooking utensils. Others were employers—hiring men to harvest crops or to make flour, olive oil, or wine. Still others were merchants—buying and selling goods. Or some might have provided a service—perhaps repairing roofs or playing musical instruments.—Exodus 35:35; Deuteronomy 24:14, 15; 2 Kings 3:15; 22:6; Matthew 20:1-8; Luke 15:25.

⁷ Can you see parallels to your own life or to that of friends and relatives? Granted, the technicalities

6, 7. Why should justice in business and in money matters concern all of us?

of work today may be different, but do you not agree that God’s view of justice in such matters would be the same as it was back then? In his messages through the 12 prophets, Jehovah showed that he expects his people to practice justice in such areas of life. As we consider some indications of that, think of how you are called on to display godly justice.—Psalm 25:4, 5.

⁸ God declared through Malachi: “I will come near to you people for the judgment, and I will become a speedy witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against those swearing falsely, and against those acting fraudulently with the wages of a wage worker, . . . while they have not feared me.” (Malachi 3:5) Yes, Jehovah condemned those who dealt unjustly with employees, or hired workers. How serious was that? Well, he listed abusing workers along with spiritism, adultery, and lying. Christians know how God will judge ‘fornicators, those practicing spiritism, and all the liars.’—Revelation 21:8.

8, 9. (a) Why was the condemnation stated at Malachi 3:5 especially serious? (b) The Scriptures promote what balanced view of employment and work?

⁹ What was happening in the workplace was not merely a matter of human morality; Jehovah’s justice was involved. He said that because of the treachery of those “acting fraudulently with the wages of a wage worker,” he would ‘come near to those people for executing judgment.’ Admittedly, God did not say that an employer had to acquiesce to every whim of an employee or a group of workers. You can see from Jesus’ illustration of men hired to work in a vineyard that an employer’s position entitled him to set wages and work conditions. (Matthew 20:1-7, 13-15) Significantly, in Jesus’ illustration all workmen were paid a denarius, the contracted ‘day’s wage,’ whether they worked the full day or not. We can also note that the employer did not use dishonesty to make more profit at the expense of those hired.—Jeremiah 22:13.

¹⁰ If you own a business with employees—or even if you just hire someone to do a job—how do your wages, requests, and monetary dealings measure up in the light of Malachi 3:5? It is good to think about

10. Why should we be interested in how our employees are treated?

this because the issue of not treating hired workers justly is considered in the Christian Greek Scriptures too. Concerning those dealing unjustly in such matters, the disciple James asked: “Is he [Jehovah] not opposing you?” (James 5:1, 4, 6) We are correct to conclude: Those who are unjust as to “the wages of a wage worker” have not really come to know Jehovah, for they are not imitating his justice.

¹¹ Now read why Jehovah opposed some prominent men in Hosea’s day: “The princes of Judah have become just like those moving back a boundary. Upon them I shall pour out my fury just like water.” (Hosea 5:10) What wrong did Hosea denounce? A Judaeen farmer lived off his land, its boundaries being marked with stones or posts. To ‘move back a boundary’ was to shrink a farmer’s plot and deprive him of some of his living, robbing him. Hosea likened Judaeen princes, who should have been advocating justice, to those moving back boundary markers.—Deuteronomy 19:14; 27:17; Job 24:2; Proverbs 22:28.

11, 12. (a) What unjust course does Hosea 5:10 highlight? (b) How can you apply the principle found at Hosea 5:10?

¹² Some today who deal in real estate might be tempted ‘to move back boundaries’ in order to deceive buyers. Yet, the principle applies to merchants, employers, employees, or clients—anyone involved with contracts or agreements. As you know, some in the business world hesitate to put things in writing, thinking that later it will be easier to do less than was agreed upon or to make new demands. Others do offer a written contract but include details in fine print in order to distort its meaning to their advantage, even if this unjustly hurts the other party. Do you think that someone acting similarly—whether a merchant or a customer, an employer or an employee—really knows the God of justice? Jehovah said in his Word: “Do not move back the boundary [of fatherless boys]. For their Redeemer is strong; *he himself will plead their cause with you.*”—Proverbs 23: 10, 11; Habakkuk 2:9.

¹³ Micah 6:10-12 sheds still more light on justice: “Do there yet exist in the house of a wicked one the

13. According to Micah 6:10-12, what injustices existed among God’s ancient people?

treasures of wickedness, and the scrimped ephah measure that is denounced? Can I be morally clean with wicked scales and with a bag of deceptive stone weights? For her own . . . inhabitants have spoken falsehood, and their tongue is tricky.” Today we may measure foods in liters or quarts, not ephahs. Or we weigh things in kilos or pounds rather than in stone weights on a balance. Still, Micah’s point is clear. Merchants or businessmen in his day were cheats; by not using standardized weights and measures, they treated people unjustly. ‘Wicked ones’ is what God called those ‘tricky with their mouth’ and in their business dealings.—Deuteronomy 25:13-16; Proverbs 20:10; Amos 8:5.

¹⁴ Do Micah’s words on deceptive weights and measures have a bearing on how you run your business or what you do as an employee? It is something to think about, since there are countless ways customers and clients get defrauded. For example, some unscrupulous contractors put less than the normal or legal amount of cement in a mix. Or, in areas that

14. Micah’s warning can help us avoid what sort of modern injustice?

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

- Regarding justice, what pattern do you have?—Psalm 37:28; Hosea 2:19, 20.
- Why should you cultivate and pursue justice?—Amos 5:6, 7; Zephaniah 2:3.
- How can you exercise justice in your business or financial dealings?—Hosea 5:10; 12:6, 7; Amos 8:5; Micah 2:1, 2; Malachi 3:5.

he knows will be hidden, a craftsman may use cheaper materials than what is paid for. Some merchants pass off as brand-new items that are actually used. And you may have heard of other so-called tricks of the trade employed to increase profits. Would you be tempted to try them? A recent book on protecting one's privacy noted that Jehovah's Witnesses "believe their Creator is watching them, and most would rather die than steal." It added: "They are in demand in businesses where large sums of money are being handled." Why? Because true Christians know that Jehovah is 'asking them to exercise justice,' including in their business and financial affairs.—Micah 6:8.

“PRINCES FOR JUSTICE ITSELF”

¹⁵ You can see from the books of the 12 prophets that in some periods, justice suffered badly. Those in authority, who should have been exemplary as to justice, were not. (Exodus 18:21; 23:6-8; Deuteronomy 1:17; 16:18) Micah pleaded: “Hear, please, you heads of Jacob and you commanders of the house of Israel. Is it not your business to know justice? You haters of what is good and lovers of badness, tearing off their skin from people and their organism from off their bones.”—Micah 3:1-3; Isaiah 1:17.

¹⁶ Those words should have shocked people familiar with rural life. A shepherd would at times shear the sheep he cared for and protected. (Genesis 38:12, 13; 1 Samuel 25:4) But the “commanders of the house of Israel,” who should have ‘known justice,’ exploited the people of God’s pasturage, as if tearing the skin and flesh off sheep and breaking their bones. (Psalm 95:7) Switching to another illustration from rural life, Micah said that princes ‘who were judging for a reward’ were like a brier

15, 16. How were the leaders in Micah’s day dealing with the people?

or a thorn hedge. (Micah 7:3, 4) Imagine passing through an area full of briars and thorn hedges. Likely, you would get scratched, and your clothes would be ripped. That illustrates the effect of the leaders on God's people. Rather than dealing with their brothers justly, they were treacherous and corrupt.—Micah 3:9, 11.

¹⁷ Zephaniah made a similar point: “Her princes in the midst of her were roaring lions. Her judges were evening wolves that did not gnaw bones till the morning.” (Zephaniah 3:3) Can you picture leaders of God's people who, like rapacious, wild lions, disregarded righteousness? Or judges who, like ravenous, insatiable wolves, devoured everything, so that only bones could be found when morning came? How could justice stand up under that? Justice was ripped to shreds by leaders who preyed on the people rather than caring for them.

¹⁸ Clearly, those leaders in a nation dedicated to God did not know him. If they had, they would have

17. According to Zephaniah 3:3, what attitude did the leaders have?

18. How should the judges in Israel have treated God's people?

obeyed Zechariah 8:16: “These are the things that you people should do: Speak truthfully with one another. With truth and the judgment of peace do your judging in your gates.” Older men in Israel met at the city gate and were to handle judicial cases, not in accord with first impressions or personal inclination, but in accord with God’s thinking. (Deuteronomy 22:15) And Jehovah had warned against showing partiality, such as toward the wealthy or prominent. (Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 1:16, 17) The judges were to try to restore peace between contending parties, rendering “the judgment of peace.”

¹⁹ The apostle Paul quoted part of Zechariah 8:16 when writing to Christians. (Ephesians 4:15, 25) So we can be sure that the 12 prophets’ warnings and counsel about justice have a valid application in the congregation today. Older men, or overseers, ought to be exemplary in knowing Jehovah and in reflecting his justice. Isaiah 32:1 describes them refreshingly as “princes for justice itself.” What practical

19, 20. (a) Why can Christian elders learn much from the 12 prophets? (b) How can elders show that they know Jehovah and his justice?

points about such elders can we discern from the warnings and counsel found in the 12 prophets?

²⁰ Christian elders ought to bear in mind Scriptural truth and indications of Jehovah's thinking. They need to base their decisions on such rather than on mere personal opinion or on what might be called a gut feeling. The Bible shows that there may be difficult cases, those that require extra time to prepare for, doing private research in the Bible and the publications containing wise counsel from the faithful and discreet slave class. (Exodus 18:26; Matthew 24:45) When elders put forth such effort, it is more likely that they will hate what is bad and love what is good from God's standpoint. This will help them to "give justice a place in the gate" so that "with true justice they will do their judging."—Amos 5:15; Zechariah 7:9.

²¹ Even if one with the responsibility to do judging has Bible knowledge, he might show some partiality. Malachi deplored the fact that the priests,

21. Why should elders avoid showing partiality, but what might tempt them to do otherwise?

who should have been a source of knowledge, “were showing partiality in the law.” (Malachi 2:7-9) How could that happen? Well, Micah said that some head ones were ‘judging merely for a bribe, and priests were instructing just for a price.’ (Micah 3:11) How might an elder’s thinking be similarly affected? What if the person he is dealing with has been generous to him in the past, or what if the elder foresees some possible benefit in the future? Or suppose the case he is handling involves someone related to him by blood or by marriage. Will family ties or spiritual principles win out? An elder’s impartiality could be affected when he is handling a case of wrongdoing or weighing whether another is Scripturally qualified for additional privileges of service in the congregation.—1 Samuel 2:22-25, 33; Acts 8:18-20; 1 Peter 5:2.

²² When someone sins seriously, the spiritual shepherds in the congregation act to protect it from any dangerous, corrupting influence. (Acts 20:28-30; Titus 3:10, 11) If, though, the erring one is genuine—

22. (a) Elders have what responsibility as to justice? (b) What other godly qualities should elders reflect when dealing with erring ones?

ly repentant, the elders want to “readjust such a man in a spirit of mildness.” (Galatians 6:1) Rather than show harsh coldness, they apply the direction: “With true justice do your judging; and carry on with one another loving-kindness and mercies.” (Zechariah 7:9) Jehovah’s regulations about handling legal cases in ancient Israel highlight his justice and mercy. Appointed judges had some latitude in many of their decisions; they could show mercy, depending on the circumstances and the wrongdoer’s attitude. Accordingly, Christian overseers must strive to judge “with true justice” and to display “loving-kindness and mercies,” thus manifesting that they have come to know Jehovah.

²³ Recall Zechariah 8:16: “With truth and the judgment of peace do your judging in your gates.” What is the objective? “The judgment of peace.” Even when the apostles were alive, there were personal differences or disputes between some Christians. As Paul did with Euodia and Syntyche, elders today

23, 24. (a) How can elders promote “the judgment of peace”? (b) The 12 prophets have helped you to appreciate what with respect to justice?

WHAT APPLICATION TODAY?

- Why do Christian elders need to be committed to justice?—Micah 3:9.
- Zechariah 8:16 gives what direction for elders and others?
- What manifestations of partiality should we be alert to avoid, and why?—Malachi 2:7-9; 1 Timothy 5:21, 22.

may need to offer assistance. (Philippians 4:2, 3) The elders should certainly strive earnestly to offer “the judgment of peace,” attempting to restore peace between contending parties. The Scriptural counsel they offer and their attitude in doing so should promote peace in the congregation and peace with God. Thus it will be evident that they truly know Jehovah and his justice.

²⁴ The two areas mentioned above illustrate that it is vital to apply in our daily lives the advice about justice recorded by the 12 prophets. What a blessing it is when we and those around us “let justice roll forth”!

SERVE JEHOVAH ACCORDING TO HIS HIGH STANDARDS

“JEHOVAH will not do good, and he will not do bad.” That is how people in Jerusalem felt in Zephaniah’s day. They reasoned that Jehovah did not expect them to live up to any particular standards. Zephaniah said that they were “congealing upon their dregs,” the particles that settle to the bottom of stored wine. He meant that the people wanted to be settled in their comfortable way of life, undisturbed by any declaration of divine intervention in their affairs. Yet, God told those Jews that he would “carefully search Jerusalem with lamps” and “give attention to” those who ignored his standards. Yes, Jehovah has standards, and he cares how his people view them.—Zephaniah 1:12.

² Today, too, many people loathe the thought of conforming to standards. You may hear them say,

- 1. How did those in Jerusalem in Zephaniah’s day feel about Jehovah’s standards?**
- 2. Where you live, what is the general attitude toward having standards?**

“Just do as you please!” Some reason, ‘If I don’t have enough money or can’t satisfy my desires, it’s OK to do whatever I need to do to change that.’ They pay little heed to how God feels or what he may require of them. What about you? Does the Creator’s setting of standards sound appealing to you?

³ Many who reject the idea of having to live up to God’s standards readily accept man’s standards in various aspects of life. For example, what about the quality of water? Most governments set standards for the quality of water that they want to be available. But what if the standards are too low? That may cause diarrhea and other waterborne diseases, with children being especially affected. More likely, though, you are benefiting from the high standards set for drinking water. “If there were no standards, we would soon notice,” says the International Organization for Standardization. “We are usually unaware of the role played by standards in raising levels of quality, safety, reliability, efficiency and

3, 4. Why do you appreciate having standards?

interchangeability—as well as in providing such benefits at an economical cost.”

⁴ If you agree that there is value in having standards in various aspects of life, is it not reasonable to expect God to have high standards for the people called by his name?—Acts 15:14.

ARE DIVINE STANDARDS REASONABLE?

⁵ When you are building a house, standards are important. If one wall is not vertical, the entire building may tilt. Or gaps between the walls may make the house uninhabitable. That was the idea of a vision that Amos, prophesying in the ninth century B.C.E., had regarding the condition of the ten-tribe nation of Israel. He saw Jehovah stationed on a wall with “a plummet in his hand.” God said: “Here I am setting a plummet in the midst of my people Israel. I shall no more do any further excusing of it.” (Amos 7:7, 8) A plummet is a weight that hangs on a cord; it is used to determine vertical accuracy. The figurative wall on which Amos saw Jehovah standing was “made with a

5. How did Jehovah demonstrate through Amos the importance of meeting His standards?

plummet.” That wall stood upright, or plumb. However, by Amos’ day the Israelites no longer met the test of spiritual uprightness—they were like a tilting wall that needed to be torn down before it fell.

⁶ As you study the 12 prophets, you will find this recurring point: It is vital to conform to God’s standards. The messages in those books were not all denunciations of a people not measuring up to God’s high standards. At times, when he examined them, Jehovah determined that his people did meet his standards. That they could do so bears out that his standards are reasonable; it is possible for imperfect humans like us to meet them. Consider an example.

⁷ After the repatriated Jews laid the temple foundation, their rebuilding work ground to a halt. So God sent his prophets Haggai and Zechariah to encourage the people to resume the project. In one vision to Zechariah, Jehovah described Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, as having “the plummet in [his] hand” when

6. (a) What is a key idea in the writings of the 12 prophets? (b) What basis do you have for saying that God’s standards are reasonable?

7. How does Zechariah help us to see that it is possible for imperfect humans to meet Jehovah’s standards?

he placed the headstone that gave the temple its finishing touch. The temple was built in harmony with divine standards. (Zechariah 4:10) But consider this interesting detail concerning the completed temple: “These seven are the eyes of Jehovah. They are roving about in all the earth.” God saw Zerubbabel put the headstone in place, and with all-perceiving eyes, He saw that the rebuilt temple withstood His scrutiny, met His standards! The point is that even though Jehovah has high standards, humans can meet them. With encouragement from Haggai and Zechariah, Zerubbabel and his people had done so. Like Zerubbabel, you too can live up to God’s expectations. How reassuring it is to know that!

WHY ACCEPT JEHOVAH’S STANDARDS?

⁸ As the Creator, God has the right to set standards for mankind and to expect us to observe them. (Revelation 4:11) Jehovah does not have to spell out everything, for he gave humans a conscience as a

8, 9. (a) Why is it appropriate for Jehovah to set standards for humans? (b) Why was it fitting that God required the Israelites to keep his commandments?

valuable guide. (Romans 2:14, 15) God did tell the first humans not to eat from “the tree of the knowledge of good and bad,” which represented God’s right to set standards of good and bad. You are familiar with what happened. (Genesis 2:17; 3:1-19) Alluding to the wrong choice that Adam had made, Hosea wrote: “[The Israelites] themselves, like earthling man, have overstepped the covenant.” (Hosea 6:7) Thus Hosea shows the deliberate nature of the Israelites’ sin.

⁹ What was that sin? “They have broken the [Law] covenant.” (*New International Version*) By rescuing his people out of Egypt, God became their owner and clearly had the right to set standards for them. The Israelites accepted the covenant with Jehovah, thus agreeing to live according to those standards. (Exodus 24:3; Isaiah 54:5) Still, many of them failed to practice the Law. They became guilty of bloodshed, murder, and fornication.—Hosea 6:8-10.

¹⁰ Jehovah sent prophets like Hosea to help His dedicated people. At the conclusion of his prophetic

10. How did God try to help those who failed to measure up to his standards?

book, Hosea declared: “Who is wise, that he may understand these things? Discreet, that he may know them? For the ways of Jehovah are upright, and the righteous are the ones who will walk in them; but the transgressors are the ones who will stumble in them.” (Hosea 14:9) Earlier in Hosea chapter 14, we find that the prophet highlighted the need to return to Jehovah. The wise ones would understand that Jehovah outlined upright ways in which his people should walk. As a dedicated servant of God, you no doubt sincerely desire to remain as such, walking in the ways of Jehovah.

¹¹ Hosea 14:9 also turns our attention to the positive aspects of observing an upright course. Blessings and benefits come from measuring up to God’s requirements. As the Creator, he knows our makeup. What he expects of us is for our good. To illustrate the relationship between us and God, we might think of an automobile and its manufacturer. The maker knows how the auto is designed and put together. He knows that the car requires an oil change every

11. Why do you want to keep God’s commandments?

so often. What would happen if you ignored that standard, perhaps reasoning that the car is running well? Much sooner than might otherwise be so, the engine would deteriorate and fail. The same is true of humans. Our Creator has given us commandments. Keeping them is for our benefit. (Isaiah 48:17, 18) Appreciating that we do benefit gives us additional reason to live up to his standards, to keep his commandments.—Psalm 112:1.

¹² The greatest reward for observing God's commandments is having a stronger bond with God. When we live by his standards and see how reasonable and beneficial they are, our affection for their Author deepens. The prophet Micah beautifully depicted that deepened relationship: "All the peoples, for their part, will walk each one in the name of its god; but we, for our part, shall walk in the name of Jehovah our God to time indefinite, even forever." (Micah 4:5) What a privilege we have to walk in the name of Jehovah, supporting his reputation and rec-

12. How can walking in God's name strengthen our bond with him?

ognizing his authority in our life! As a natural consequence, we want to reflect his qualities. Individually, let us work to strengthen our bond with God.—Psalm 9:10.

¹³ Those who live up to God’s standards and walk in the divine name are said to fear God’s name. That is not negative or bad. Jehovah assures such ones: “To you who are in fear of my name the sun of righteousness will certainly shine forth, with healing in its wings; and you will actually go forth and paw the ground like fattened calves.” (Malachi 4:2) In the fulfillment of this prophecy, “the sun of righteousness” is Jesus Christ. (Revelation 1:16) He shines forth now with spiritual healing and, in time, will shine forth with physical healing for mankind. The joy of the healed ones is likened to that of fattened calves that “go forth and paw the ground,” excited and delighted to be free. Have you not already experienced a large measure of such liberation?—John 8:32.

¹⁴ Another way that you can benefit from adhering to

13. Why is fearing God’s name not negative or bad?

14, 15. In what ways do you benefit from adhering to Jehovah’s standards?

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

- How is God affected by your observing or not observing his standards?—Amos 7:7-9.
- Why do you say that Jehovah's standards are reasonable?—Zechariah 4:10.
- What reasons do you have for accepting God's standards?—Micah 4:5; Malachi 4:2; 2 Corinthians 5:15; Revelation 4:11.

God's standards is in improved relations with fellow humans. Habakkuk declared five woes—against those who coveted, those who went after dishonest gain, those who shed blood, those who schemed to commit sexual wrongs, and those who worshipped idols. (Habakkuk 2:6-19) The fact that Jehovah declared these woes shows clearly that he has set standards as to how we should live our life. But note this point: Four of the wrongs mentioned have to do with how we treat our fellow man. If we cultivate God's view, we will not harm our neighbors. Thus, our relationship with most of them should improve.

¹⁵ A third way that we benefit involves family happiness. People today often view divorce as the ultimate solution to marital discord. Yet, through the mouth of the prophet Malachi, Jehovah stated: “He has hated a divorcing.” (Malachi 2:16) We will consider Malachi 2:16 in more detail later, but at this point note from it that God has wisely set standards to be observed by members of the family; to the extent that they do so, peace will prevail. (Ephesians 5:28, 33; 6:1-4) Admittedly, we are all imperfect, so problems will arise. Yet, in the book of Hosea, the One “to whom every family in heaven and on earth owes its name” gave an object lesson that reveals how to solve even some extreme marital problems. That too we will examine in a later chapter of this book. (Ephesians 3:15) Let us now see what else is involved in observing God’s standards.

“HATE WHAT IS BAD, AND LOVE WHAT IS GOOD”

¹⁶ The first man, Adam, made a foolish choice as to whose standards of good and bad were best. Will we

16. How does Amos 5:15 relate to God’s standards?

choose more wisely? Amos admonished us to have strong feelings about this, urging: “Hate what is bad, and love what is good.” (Amos 5:15) William Rainey Harper, late professor of Semitic languages and literatures at the University of Chicago, noted about this verse: “The standard of good and evil, in [Amos’] mind, is conformity with Yahweh’s will.” This is a central concept that we can learn from the 12 prophets. Are we willing to accept Jehovah’s standards of good and bad? Those high standards are revealed to us in the Bible and explained by mature, experienced Christians who make up “the faithful and discreet slave.”—Matthew 24:45-47.

¹⁷ Our hating what is bad helps us to refrain from things that displease God. For example, a man may be aware of the dangers of Internet pornography and try to turn away from viewing it. Yet, how does ‘the man he is inside’ feel about the content of pornographic Web sites? (Ephesians 3:16) By applying the divine exhortation found at Amos 5:15, he will find 17, 18. **(a) Why is it vital to hate what is bad? (b) Illustrate how we can cultivate strong hatred for what is bad.**

it easier to cultivate hatred for what is bad. He may thus be victorious in his spiritual struggle.

¹⁸ Consider another example. Can you imagine prostrating yourself before idols of sex worship? Just the thought of it is repugnant, is it not? Still, Hosea spoke of the Israelites' forefathers committing immorality in front of Baal of Peor. (Numbers 25: 1-3; Hosea 9:10) Apparently, Hosea mentioned this incident because Baal worship was a major sin of the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel. (2 Kings 17:16-18; Hosea 2:8, 13) We can just imagine the disgusting scene: The Israelites were bending down to idols during sexual orgies. Our knowing how God condemned that can help each one of us to fight against snares that Satan sets via the Internet. Today, many are idolizing beautiful women and handsome men who are featured in popular entertainment. How different, though, for those of us who have learned from the prophets' warnings about idol worship!

KEEP GOD'S WORD IN MIND

¹⁹ As you work at upholding God's high standards

19. What can you learn from Jonah's actions in the belly of a big fish?

amid temptations and difficulties, you may at times feel incapable or at a loss to know what to do. If your mental or emotional power seems scanty, how can you face a critical situation successfully? (Proverbs 24:10) Well, there is something to learn from Jonah, whom we know was an imperfect man with failings. Recall what he did in the belly of a big fish. He prayed to Jehovah. Notice the content of his prayer.

²⁰ When Jonah prayed to God “out of the belly of Sheol,” he used many words and phrases that he was familiar with, words of the psalms. (Jonah 2:2) He was severely distressed and beseeched Jehovah for mercy, yet the words of David came to Jonah’s lips. For example, compare the words of Jonah 2:3, 5 with those of Psalm 69:1, 2.* Is it not clear that Jonah had become acquainted with psalms of David that were available to the prophet? The words and expressions of inspired psalms welled up within him. Jonah had God’s inspired word ‘in his inward parts.’ (Psalm 40:8) If you are confronted with an emotion-

* Compare also Jonah 2:2, 4-9 with Psalm 18:6; 31:22; 30:3; 142:3; 31:6; and 3:8 in the order of use by Jonah.

20. How could you equip yourself to do what Jonah did?

ally draining situation, can you call to mind some appropriate sayings of God? Your now becoming ever more familiar with God's Word may well prove to be extremely helpful in the future as you face decisions and resolve problems in line with God's standards.

HAVE A HEALTHY FEAR OF GOD

²¹ Of course, just having the Word of God in your treasure store is not enough to make you stick to Jehovah's standards. The prophet Micah gives added insight into what you need in order to apply the Word of God: "The person of practical wisdom will fear your name." (Micah 6:9) To be a person of practical wisdom, one who can apply in his own life what he knows, you must cultivate fear of God's name.

²² How can you learn to fear God's name? Well, consult the postexilic prophet Haggai. In his very short book, only 38 verses long, he used the name Jehovah 35 times! When Jehovah commissioned Haggai to prophesy, in 520 B.C.E., 16 years had passed with

- 21. What do you need to cultivate in order to stick to God's standards?**
22, 23. (a) Why did Jehovah send Haggai to the repatriated Jews?
(b) You have what reason for confidence that you will be able to observe God's standards?

little work done on the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. God’s people had become disheartened because of opposition by their enemies. (Ezra 4:4, 5) The people reasoned that the time to rebuild the temple had not come. Jehovah admonished them: “Set your heart upon your ways. . . . Build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and I may be glorified.” —Haggai 1:2-8.

²³ Governor Zerubbabel, High Priest Joshua, and “all the remaining ones of the people began to listen to the voice of Jehovah their God, . . . and the people began to fear because of Jehovah.” At that, God responded: “I am with you people.” What reassurance! With the help of God’s spirit, the people “began to enter in and to do the work in the house of Jehovah.” (Haggai 1:12-14) The healthy fear of displeasing God moved people who had been fainthearted to act despite opposition.

²⁴ How about you? If you realize what the divine standards are in the situation you face, will you have

24, 25. Using specific examples, illustrate how you can apply the principles set out in this chapter.

the courage needed to fear Jehovah instead of men? Perhaps you are a young woman, and on the job, there is a man who does not share your godly principles. Still, he is kind and attentive. Will a scripture come to mind, reminding you of Jehovah's standards and the dangers of ignoring them? What about Hosea 4:11? "Fornication and wine and sweet wine are what take away good motive." Combined with that, will your fear of God move you to stick to his standard and say no if that man invites you to some social event? If he starts to flirt, fear of displeasing your loving God can help you to 'take to flight.'—Genesis 39:12; Jeremiah 17:9.

²⁵ Now let us return to the example of a man trying to resist the pull of Internet pornography. Will he recall the words of Psalm 119:37, which are in the form of a prayer? "Make my eyes pass on from seeing what is worthless." And will he mentally review Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount? "Everyone that keeps on looking at a woman so as to have a passion for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:28) Having fear of Jehovah

HOW CAN THE FOLLOWING HELP YOU TO OBSERVE GOD'S STANDARDS?

- Hating bad—Amos 5:15.
- Having God's Word in your treasure store—Jonah 2:4-9.
- Cultivating fear of Jehovah—Haggai 1:12-14.

and the desire to live up to his standards should move a Christian to turn away from what can corrupt. Whenever you are tempted to think or act contrary to God's standards, try to cultivate increased godly fear. And bear in mind what Jehovah tells you through Haggai: "I am with you."

²⁶ Yes, you can serve Jehovah according to his high standards and be benefited in doing so. As you continue to examine the 12 prophetic books, God's standards, or what he requires of each of us, will become ever clearer. The next section of this book will take up three major areas in which Jehovah sets admirable standards: our conduct, our dealings with others, and our family life.

26. What will we yet consider?

S E C T I O N 3

PLEASE GOD IN YOUR CONDUCT AND DEALINGS

How would you answer the question: “What is Jehovah asking back from you?” (Micah 6:8) The writings of the 12 prophets offer insights into this. As you will see in Chapters 8 to 10 of this book, those writings can help you to cope with such challenges as how to be truthful in all you say and how to avoid violence. You will also discover practical advice that they offer about family life, advice that you can likely use.

‘WHAT IS JEHOVAH ASKING FROM YOU?’

PICTURE this scene: A girl is startled by violent pounding on the door. She fears that it is the corrupt merchant who is demanding the money her family owes him. He has exploited many by using false weights and charging illegal interest. To get away with that, he bribes town leaders, who ignore the victims’ outcries. The girl feels defenseless; her father has abandoned her family for a younger woman. She and her mother may be sold as slaves.

² That scenario is a composite of some of the practices that the 12 prophets decried. (Amos 5:12; 8:4-6; Micah 6:10-12; Zephaniah 3:3; Malachi 2:13-16; 3:5) If you had been living then, how would you have reacted? As negative as the picture seems, you can be heartened by positive features of Jehovah’s dealings with his people during the days of those

1, 2. Why is it heartening to note how Jehovah reacted to the moral decay of his ancient people?

prophets. Yes, you can see from those 12 books that God stressed lofty qualities and attitudes. His encouragement can fortify your morals, motivate you to do good, and move you to praise him. Because Jehovah's day of judgment is fast approaching, your noting the positive message in those books can give you insight into what God is asking of you. Start by looking at Micah's day, in the eighth century B.C.E.

WHAT IS JEHOVAH ASKING FROM YOU?

³ Reading Micah's book, you might at first feel that it is a litany of accusations against the wayward Israelites. Granted, Jehovah was not blind to the moral decay of his dedicated people, including those he described as "haters of what is good and lovers of badness." (Micah 3:2; 6:12) Still, along with the denunciation, there is one of the Bible's most appealing and motivating admonitions. Micah focuses on the Source of righteous standards and asks this thought-provoking question: "What is Jehovah asking back from you but to exercise justice and to love

3, 4. (a) What appealing entreaty is included in the book of Micah? (b) How are you personally affected by the question at Micah 6:8?

kindness and to be modest in walking with your God?”—Micah 6:8.

⁴ Do you discern here an entreaty from our Creator? We are lovingly reminded of positive attitudes that we are in a position to adopt rather than letting ourselves get sidetracked by prevailing wickedness. Jehovah knows that as loyal humans we want to cultivate godly qualities, and he does not lose faith in us. How would you respond if you were personally asked: ‘What is Jehovah asking from *you*?’ Can you pinpoint areas in your life where God’s moral standards are making—or should be making—a difference? Your relationship with God and the quality of your life will greatly improve as you keep measuring up to those standards. With a global paradise just before you, take encouragement from this exhortation: “Sow seed for yourselves in righteousness; reap in accord with loving-kindness. Till for yourselves arable land, when there is time for searching for Jehovah until he comes and gives instruction in righteousness to you.” (Hosea 10:12)

Now let us examine some key points in the fine advice of Micah 6:8.

“BE MODEST”

⁵ Significantly, Micah states that Jehovah is asking us to “be modest in walking with” Him. Being modest can only benefit us because “wisdom is with the modest ones.” (Proverbs 11:2) Being modest includes being aware of the limitations Adamic sin imposes on us. Our admitting that we are born in sin is a vital first step in striving to avoid any willful sin.—Romans 7:24, 25.

⁶ Why is modesty coupled with lowliness of mind so important in avoiding willful sin? Well, a modest person recognizes the power that sin can exert. (Psalm 51:3) Hosea helps us to understand that sin can be seductive and that it always proves devastating in the end. For example, Jehovah promised to “hold an accounting” for the disobedience of his ancient people. Does that sound as if those

5. Why is it important to “be modest” in walking with God?

6. How can we benefit if we modestly recognize sin’s consequences?

EXEMPLARY MODESTY AND CANDOR

Jonah displayed frankness and modesty that is not found among non-Biblical writers. He freely told of his own disobedience and of episodes when he lacked trust in Jehovah. He did not try to cover over his improper attitude toward his commission or toward God's sparing of the Ninevites. What a fine example of modesty for us to imitate!

immodest sinners could escape all consequences? They may have hoped to, since sin often deludes and enslaves. More important, sin separates sinners from God, possibly causing them to reach this extreme: "Their dealings do not permit of a returning to their God." Willful sin will erode the moral fiber of the wrongdoer's life, transforming him into a 'practicer of what is harmful.' In addition, sin makes the sinner's life fruitless. Granted, for a while he may seem successful, but the unrepentant sinner cannot expect to have God's approval.—Hosea 1:4; 4:11-13; 5:4; 6:8.

⁷ Modest people also admit that they need God’s direction to avoid the sad consequences of sin. Micah foresaw a time—our day—when multitudes would eagerly seek to be ‘instructed about Jehovah’s ways’ and to “walk in his paths.” Such meek ones look for the “law” and “the word of Jehovah.” You are probably finding your happy place among those who desire to “walk in the name of Jehovah” by responding to his requirements. Even so, like Micah, you might be interested in additional ways to remain “morally clean.” (Micah 4:1-5; 6:11) Modestly seeking to do what Jehovah is asking from you will greatly assist you.

CULTIVATE ELEVATED MORALS

⁸ In promoting our spiritual and physical welfare, Jehovah asks us to be morally chaste despite the degradation in the world around us. (Malachi 2:15) We are inundated by sexually charged messages. Many people feel that viewing pornographic pictures and films, reading about lewd sexual activities,

7. How do modest people respond to Jehovah’s direction?

8. What have you noted about the morals of the world today?

and listening to songs with suggestive lyrics are a normal part of life. Beyond that, there are people who show disrespect for women, considering them little more than sexual objects. Or youths in school may pepper their talk with obscene jokes and sexual innuendos. How can you resist such corrupting influences?

⁹ The 12 prophets that we are considering offer precious admonition. They lived before the era of the multiscreen theater and the video store, yet in their time there were phallic symbols, so-called sacred prostitution, and shameless promiscuity. (1 Kings 14:24; Isaiah 57:3, 4; Habakkuk 2:15) You can see evidence of that in what the prophets wrote: “As to the men, it is with the harlots that they get off to themselves, and with the female temple prostitutes that they sacrifice.” “A man and his own father have gone to the same girl, for the purpose of profaning my holy name.” Some regularly made “payment for prostitutes” at fertility

9. How did many fail to uphold Jehovah’s standards during the time of the 12 prophets?

rites.* Adultery was rampant, with unfaithful spouses “going after [their] passionate lovers.”—Hosea 2: 13; 4:2, 13, 14; Amos 2:7; Micah 1:7, *Contemporary English Version*.

¹⁰ You probably realize that sexual immorality reflects a person’s attitude and motives. (Mark 7:20-22) Jehovah said about his immoral people that “the very spirit of fornication [“lusting for sex,” *CEV*] has caused them to wander off” and that “they have carried on nothing but loose conduct.” (Hosea 4:12; 6:9)[#] Zechariah mentioned “the spirit of uncleanness.” (Zechariah 13:2) The people’s course involved a brazen attitude, disregard or even contempt for Jehovah’s standards and authority. Thus, in order to correct his motives, a person would

* Bible translator Joseph Rotherham says of the nations of Canaan, whose conduct the Israelites copied: “Their very worship was grossly sensual and revoltingly cruel. In honour of their deities women surrendered their virtue. Their sacred places were brothels. The generative organs were openly represented by disgusting symbols. The peoples had holy (!) prostitutes, male and female.”

[#] God’s people were also guilty of spiritual fornication. They sought illicit relationships with pagan nations and mixed Baal worship with true worship.

10. (a) What is mainly behind immoral conduct? (b) How did God’s ancient people become guilty of spiritual fornication?

WHAT CAN YOU LEARN

- from Jehovah's appeal that you live according to his standards?—Zechariah 6:15; Malachi 3:16, 18.
- by meditating on the nature and the sad consequences of sin?—Malachi 4:1; Romans 6:12-14; 1 Corinthians 6:18.
- from the moral lapses of God's ancient people?—Hosea 8:7; 10:12; 14:9.

have to change his thinking and his heart condition radically. Realizing this should make Christians even more thankful for the help they receive to avoid immorality and its tragic consequences.

PURSUE CHASTITY

¹¹ You may have seen that loose morals often break up families, deprive children of parental guidance, lead to loathsome diseases, and give rise to life-destroying abortions. Those who disregard the Creator in matters of sexuality frequently experi-

11. What are some consequences of sexual immorality?

ence physical and emotional harm. Micah wrote: “Because of the fact that [a person] has become unclean, there is a wrecking; and the wrecking work is painful.” (Micah 2:10) Knowing this strengthens the resolve of godly people. They avoid defiling their heart and mind by dwelling on impure thoughts. —Matthew 12:34; 15:18.

¹² Christians do not react merely out of fear of disease or illegitimacy. They see the value of cultivating love for God’s law and adopting his view of sexual morals. Jehovah set in humans a normal desire for sexual relations as an expression of marital love. That was part of God’s creative purpose. When kept in its proper context—marriage—sex works for the good, bringing a husband and wife together as one and sometimes resulting in procreation. Nevertheless, when sex is carried on outside of marriage, it is powerfully destructive, as borne out by what the 12 prophets depicted. Immoral sex practices led to God’s disapproval. That was a very high price to pay

12. How do we benefit by accepting Jehovah’s view of sex?

back then, and it would be an equally high price for any individual to pay today.

¹³ Hosea implored his contemporaries to remove, or ‘put away, fornication from before themselves,’ implying that they take concrete action to protect their morals. (Hosea 2:2) In our case, it is the wise course to remove ourselves from any compromising situation. For instance, you may face a recurring temptation at school or in your neighborhood. You may not be able to change schools or residences, yet there may be other ways to distance yourself from the tempting circumstance and consequently to ‘put away fornication from before you.’ Make it known to others that you are a true Christian, one of Jehovah’s Witnesses. In a clear, respectful way, explain your values and your beliefs. Be sure that others are aware that you are resolved to maintain Jehovah’s high standards. (Amos 5:15) Another means of ‘putting away fornication’ is by avoiding pornography and questionable entertainment. That may involve discarding a magazine or finding new companions

13. How can we, in a sense, ‘put away fornication’ and avoid temptation?

—those who love Jehovah and who agree that you should do what he is asking from you. (Micah 7:5) Yes, with Jehovah’s help, you can avoid being contaminated by the world’s immorality!

“LOVE KINDNESS”

¹⁴ Micah stressed that Jehovah asks us to “love kindness.” To be kind involves doing good things rather than anything harmful. Kindness is closely associated with goodness and moral excellence. It calls on us to be honest and just in our personal affairs and in our dealings with others. In Chapter 6 of this book, we examined important areas of life, such as business and money matters, in which justice and honesty play a vital role. But those are not the only areas of life in which we should be just, honest, and kind.

¹⁵ People who love kindness and who want to do good toward others strive to be above reproach. Jehovah said to the Israelites who were not fulfilling their material obligations toward pure worship:

14, 15. (a) What does it mean to “love kindness”? (b) How does love of kindness help us to be above reproach?

“You are robbing me.” (Malachi 3:8) Can you discern ways that one might be “robbing” God today? What if a Christian has access to funds contributed for the advancement of Kingdom interests in the local congregation or in another setting? Whose money is it? Such funds ultimately belong to Jehovah, since they were offered for the furtherance of his worship. (2 Corinthians 9:7) Should anyone think that he can “borrow” such money to care for a personal emergency or otherwise use dedicated funds without proper authorization? Of course not. That would be tantamount to stealing from God! And it would certainly not be acting kindly or justly toward those who contributed such funds for God’s work.—Proverbs 6:30, 31; Zechariah 5:3.

¹⁶ Kindness and goodness also move Christians to avoid covetousness. During Amos’ time, extreme greed was common. Insatiable predators were willing to ‘sell someone righteous’—their own fellow worshipper—“for mere silver”! (Amos 2:6) It was similar in Micah’s time, when the wealthy of Judah

16, 17. (a) How did some manifest greed in the days of Amos and those of Micah? (b) What is God’s view of covetousness?

grabbed property from those who were too weak to defend themselves, taking it by force if necessary. (Micah 2:2; 3:10) In seizing the land of their fellowmen, those greedy individuals were violating Jehovah's Law: including the last of the Ten Words and the regulations against permanent sale of inherited land.—Exodus 20:13, 15, 17; Leviticus 25:23-28.

¹⁷ It might not be as common today for humans to be sold or enslaved as it was in the days of the prophets. Yet, what about taking financial advantage of or exploiting others? A Christian who loves kindness will certainly not exploit his fellow worshippers. For example, he realizes that it would be neither proper nor kind to start a business or promote an investment scheme that targets fellow believers as the main customers. It would display greed, which Christians are warned against, to plan on making money hastily by exploiting fellow Christians. (Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; James 4:1-5) Greed can manifest itself in love of money, desire for power or gain, even voraciousness for food and drink, sex, or other things. Micah showed that

self-serving, greedy people will “not get satisfied.” That is true today too.—Micah 6:14.

¹⁸ Jehovah instructed his people to ‘defraud no alien resident.’ And through Malachi, God declared: ‘I will come near to you people for the judgment, against those turning away the alien resident.’ (Zechariah 7:10; Malachi 3:5) Has the area where you live been undergoing change because of an influx of immigrants or others of a different nationality, race, or background? Perhaps they have moved there in search of security, jobs, or better living conditions. How do you view people whose language and lifestyle differ from yours? Do you find in yourself any tendencies toward prejudice, which would be precisely the opposite of kindness?

¹⁹ Think how positively people will react if you show that those who are from other lands or backgrounds are equally deserving of Christian truth. Kindness would also work against any feeling that such newcomers are infringing on the use of the

18, 19. (a) What did some of the 12 prophets say about Jehovah’s care for the “alien resident”? (b) How can showing loving interest in others improve relations where you live?

Kingdom Hall or other resources. The apostle Paul reminded some first-century Jewish Christians, who felt a degree of prejudice toward non-Jews, that really no one was deserving; only God's undeserved kindness made it possible for anyone to attain to salvation. (Romans 3:9-12, 23, 24) Kindness to others will move us to rejoice that God's love is now reaching many people who previously may have had little opportunity to hear the good news. (1 Timothy 2:4) People from other lands or backgrounds are often disadvantaged, so we ought to show them concern and kindness, welcoming them into our midst, treating each one "like a native" among us.—Leviticus 19:34.

WALK WITH THE *TRUE* GOD

²⁰ Micah also emphasized walking with God, looking to him as the true God, seeking his guidance. (Proverbs 3:5, 6; Hosea 7:10) After the Jews returned from exile, some turned to diviners, fortune-tellers, and false gods, perhaps for help during a drought. In reality they invoked wicked spirit forces

20. To whom did some Israelites turn for direction?

to assist them, despite Jehovah's having clearly condemned all such practices. (Deuteronomy 18:9-14; Micah 3:6, 11; 5:12; Haggai 1:10, 11; Zechariah 10:1, 2) Those Jews were getting involved with spirit creatures who are in opposition to the true God!

²¹ Today some think that the wicked spirits mentioned in the Scriptures are merely symbolic of the concept of evil. However, the Bible reveals that the demons are real and are behind astrology, witchcraft, and some types of magic. (Acts 16:16-18; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6) The dangers of spiritism are equally real. People in many cultures look to shamans, or medicine men who claim mysterious powers, and to sorcerers. Others seek direction from the horoscope or employ tarot cards, divining rods, Ouija boards, or special crystals. Even attempts to communicate with spirits of the dead are quite common. Reportedly, certain statesmen have turned to astrology and spiritistic mediums for help in decision making. All of that is clearly contrary to Micah's advice that we walk with the true God, following his guidance.

21, 22. (a) What forms of spiritism are common in your area? (b) Why do true servants of Jehovah not dabble in the occult?

²² Certainly you—a true servant of Jehovah—must shun such practices. You can be sure that God never uses magic or the occult to reveal his will or to exercise his power. Instead, as Amos 3:7 assures us, Jehovah ‘reveals his confidential matter to his servants the prophets.’ Moreover, dabbling in the occult can bring one under the influence and control of the leader of the demons, Satan, who is a liar and whose strategy is to deceive people. He and his minions are out to harm, having always been cruel, even killing people. (Job 1:7-19; 2:7; Mark 5:5) Understandably, Micah condemned divination and sorceries when he urged us to walk with the true God.

²³ True spirituality is found only with Jehovah and his pure worship. (John 4:24) “Make your requests of Jehovah,” the prophet Zechariah wrote. (Zechariah 10:1) Even if you experience attacks or temptations caused by wicked spirit forces, remember that “everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will get away safe.” (Joel 2:32) This reassurance is significant as we keep close in mind his great day.

23. Who only can satisfy our proper requests?

HOW CAN YOU BENEFIT

- by adopting Jehovah’s view of sexual morality?—Hosea 3:3; 4:11.
- by applying the 12 prophets’ admonitions against greed and self-interest?—Micah 7: 5-7; Philippians 2:4.
- by guarding against spiritism and occult practices?—Micah 5:12; Nahum 3:4; Malachi 3:5.

²⁴ Clearly, the words at Micah 6:8 provide us with much food for thought. To build strong morality, we need proper motives and godly qualities. Hosea offered encouragement for those of us living in “the final part of the days.” He said that during our time, God-fearing people would seek Jehovah’s goodness. (Hosea 3:5) Amos confirmed God’s invitation for us to do exactly that: “Search for what is good, . . . to the end that you people may keep living.” We are also urged: “Love what is good.” (Amos 5:14, 15) If we do so, we will be refreshed by doing what Jehovah is asking of us.

24. What lessons did you take away from Micah 6:8?

DEALING WITH OTHERS AS GOD DESIRES

WHAT comes to mind when you hear ancient Tyre mentioned? Many Christians would think of how prophecy was fulfilled when Alexander the Great scraped up debris from the ruins of mainland Tyre and built a causeway out to the newer island-city of Tyre and destroyed it. (Ezekiel 26:4, 12; Zechariah 9:3, 4) Yet, would mention of Tyre make you think about how to treat your spiritual brothers or others and how not to treat them?

² Why was Tyre destroyed? “On account of three revolts of Tyre, . . . on account of their handing over a complete body of exiles to Edom, and because *they did not remember the covenant of brothers*. And I will send a fire onto the wall of Tyre.” (Amos 1: 9, 10) In earlier times, King Hiram of Tyre showed

- 1-3. (a) What might many Christians think of regarding ancient Tyre?
(b) Describe some of the dealings between King Hiram and Israel.
(c) What might we want to consider regarding Tyre?**

goodwill toward David and supplied materials for Solomon's temple. Solomon made a covenant with Hiram and gave him cities in Galilee. Hiram called Solomon "my brother." (1 Kings 5:1-18; 9:10-13, 26-28; 2 Samuel 5:11) When Tyre "did not remember the covenant of brothers" and sold some of God's people into slavery, Jehovah took note of Tyre's dealings.

³ What lesson can we draw from the fact that God judged the Canaanites of Tyre for dealing harshly with his people? A key lesson involves how we deal with our spiritual brothers. In previous chapters of this book, we noted from the 12 prophets some advice about dealing with others, such as being just in our business practices and chaste in our conduct. These 12 books, though, contain more indications of how God desires us to deal with others.

DO NOT REJOICE OVER ANOTHER'S DIFFICULTY

⁴ You can find a lesson in God's condemnation of

4. In what sense were the Edomites "brothers" to Israel, but how did they treat their "brothers"?

Edom, a land near Israel: “You ought not to watch the sight in the day of your brother, in the day of his misfortune; and you ought not to rejoice at the sons of Judah in the day of their perishing.” (Obadiah 12) The Tyrians may have been “brothers” as to commercial activities, but the Edomites were in a real sense “brothers” to Israel, for they had descended from Esau, Jacob’s twin. Even Jehovah called the Edomites Israel’s “brothers.” (Deuteronomy 2:1-4) Hence, it was truly hateful of the Edomites to rejoice when the Jews met calamity at the hands of the Babylonians.—Ezekiel 25:12-14.

⁵ Clearly, God did not approve of how the Edomites dealt with their Jewish brothers. We might ask, though, ‘How would God evaluate the way I deal with my brothers?’ One area of concern is how we view and treat a brother when things have not gone smoothly. For example, imagine that a Christian offended you or had a problem with one of your relatives. If you have “a cause for complaint,” will you

5. In what situations might we show a spirit like that of the Edomites?

harbor resentment, not putting the matter behind you or not attempting to settle it? (Colossians 3:13; Joshua 22:9-30; Matthew 5:23, 24) Doing so could affect your actions toward the brother; you might act coolly, avoiding his company or speaking negatively about him. Extending the example, imagine that this brother later erred, perhaps even needing counsel or correction from the congregation elders. (Galatians 6:1) Would you reflect the Edomites' spirit and rejoice over the brother's difficulty? How would God want you to act?

⁶ Jehovah had Zechariah mention His desire that we “scheme out nothing bad against one another in [our] hearts.” (Zechariah 7:9, 10; 8:17) This advice is pertinent when we feel that a brother has hurt us or wronged someone in our family. In such cases, it is easy to ‘scheme out bad in our hearts’ and then to reflect that in our deeds. On the other hand, God wants us to imitate his positive example. Recall that Micah wrote that Jehovah is “pardoning error and

6. In contrast with Zechariah 7:10, what does Micah 7:18 suggest that we do?

passing over transgression.”* (Micah 7:18) How can we apply that in practical ways?

⁷ We may feel hurt over what was done to us or to our relative, but really, how serious is it? The Bible outlines steps for settling differences, even a sin against a brother. Still, it is often best just to overlook the error or the offense, to ‘pass over transgression.’ Ask yourself: ‘Might this be one of the 77 times that I should forgive him? Why not simply forget it?’ (Matthew 18:15-17, 21, 22) Even if the offense seems significant now, will it be so a thousand years from now? Draw a basic lesson from the comment at Ecclesiastes 5:20 about a worker’s enjoying food and drink: “Not often will he remember the days of his life, because the true God is preoccupying him with the rejoicing of his heart.” As that man happily focuses on his current pleasure, he tends to

* As to “passing over transgression,” one scholar says that the Hebrew metaphor is “taken from the conduct of a traveller who passes on without noticing an object to which he does not wish to give his attention. The idea [is not that God is unobservant of sin] but that he does not mark it in particular cases with a view to punishment; that he does not punish, but forgive[s].”

7. Why might we choose simply to forget an offense?

forget the problems of his daily life. Can we imitate that attitude? If we focus on the joys of our Christian brotherhood, we may be able to forget issues that are not lastingly important, ones that we will not recall in the new world. That is quite different from rejoicing over another's difficulty or remembering offenses.

TELL OTHERS THE TRUTH

⁸ The 12 prophetic books also highlight how much God desires that we be truthful in our dealings. Of course, we exert ourselves in speaking “the truth of that good news” to others. (Colossians 1:5; 2 Corinthians 4:2; 1 Timothy 2:4, 7) What may be more of a challenge, though, is adhering to truth in daily speech with our family and spiritual brothers, conversation that covers a wide variety of topics and situations. Why may that be so?

⁹ Who of us has not said or done something unkind and then later been confronted about it? We

8. We face what challenge as to speaking the truth?

9. When might we be tempted to speak less than the truth, but what should we ask ourselves?

likely felt embarrassed or somewhat guilty. Such feelings can lead a person to deny an error or offer some “explanation” that twists the truth in order to excuse the wrong or make it appear correct. Or in an uncomfortable situation, we might be tempted to mention only selected details, editing them to color the facts. Hence, what we say might technically be true yet give a totally different impression. While this may not be flagrant lying, such as is common in the world today, is it really ‘speaking truth each one with his neighbor,’ or brother? (Ephesians 4:15, 25; 1 Timothy 4:1, 2) When a Christian phrases things in such a way that he inwardly knows is leading brothers to a wrong conclusion, to believe something that is really not true, not accurate, how do you think God feels?

¹⁰ The prophets realized that even men and women dedicated to Jehovah at times ignore what he wants from them. Hosea expressed God’s feelings about some in his day: “Despoiling to them, for 10. How do the prophets describe a course common in ancient Israel and Judah?

they have transgressed against me! And I myself proceeded to redeem them, but they themselves have spoken lies even against me.” Beyond telling direct and undeniable lies against Jehovah, some gave in to “the pronouncing of curses and practicing of deception,” perhaps distorting facts so as to mislead others. (Hosea 4:1, 2; 7:1-3, 13; 10:4; 12:1) Hosea wrote those words in Samaria, the northern kingdom. Were things better in Judah? Micah tells us: “Her own rich men have become full of violence, and her own inhabitants have spoken falsehood, and their tongue is tricky in their mouth.” (Micah 6:12) It is good that we be aware of how those prophets condemned the “practicing of deception” and those whose “tongue is tricky in their mouth.” Thus even Christians, who would certainly not tell deliberate lies, can ask: ‘Might I at times practice deception or have a tricky tongue in my mouth? What does God desire of me in this respect?’

¹¹ On the positive side, God also used the proph-

11. What do the prophets reveal about God’s will as to our speech?

ets to make clear the good that he desires of us. Zechariah 8:16 says: “These are the things that you people should do: Speak truthfully with one another. With truth and the judgment of peace do your judging in your gates.” In Zechariah’s day the gates were public locations where older men handled judicial cases. (Ruth 4:1; Nehemiah 8:1) Nonetheless, Zechariah did not say that this was the only circumstance in which to speak honestly. We must be honest in formal situations, but we are also urged: “Speak truthfully with one another.” That includes in the privacy of our home when speaking with our marriage mate or close relatives. It also applies to our everyday conversations with spiritual brothers and sisters, whether we are speaking face-to-face, talking on the telephone, or communicating in another way. They have every reason to expect that what we are saying is the truth. Christian parents should stress to their children how vital it is to avoid falsehoods. Young ones can thus grow up aware that God expects them to avoid a tricky tongue and to be truly honest in what they say.—Zephaniah 3:13.

WHAT DOES JEHOVAH DESIRE?

- How can Jehovah’s example help us deal with a brother who has offended us?—Hosea 14:2; Micah 7:18; Malachi 2:10, 11.
- Comparing Hosea 4:1 with Zechariah 8:16 shows that Jehovah expects what of us in our dealings?
- What aspect of your dealings with others would you like to improve?

¹² A youth or an adult who holds to the way of truthfulness agrees with Zechariah’s exhortation: “Love truth and peace.” (Zechariah 8:19) And note Malachi’s description of what Jehovah saw exemplified by His Son: “The very law of truth proved to be in his mouth, and there was no unrighteousness to be found on his lips. In peace and in uprightness he walked with me.” (Malachi 2:6) Would Jehovah want anything less of us? Remember, we have his entire Word available, including the 12 prophets with all the lessons we can draw from them.

12. What valuable lessons can we learn from the prophetic books?

AVOID VIOLENCE IN YOUR DEALINGS

¹³ Micah 6:12 tells us that one way in which God’s ancient people mistreated others was ‘they spoke falsehood, and their tongue was tricky in their mouth.’ However, that verse identified yet another serious defect. It mentioned that the ‘rich men had become full of violence.’ How was that, and what lesson can we draw from it?

¹⁴ Consider the reputation of some nations located near God’s people. To the northeast was Assyria, with its capital, Nineveh, about which Nahum wrote: “Woe to the city of bloodshed. She is all full of deception and of robbery. Prey does not depart!” (Nahum 3:1) The Assyrians were known for aggressive warfare and cruelty to prisoners of war—some prisoners were burned or skinned alive, and others were blinded or had their nose, ears, or fingers cut off. The book *Gods, Graves, and Scholars* says: “Nineveh was impressed on the consciousness of mankind by little else than murder, plunder, suppression, and the violation of the weak; by war and all

13. Micah 6:12 sheds light on what other problem that existed?

14, 15. Nations surrounding God’s people had what record as to violence?

manner of physical violence.” We have an eyewitness to (and possible sharer in) that violence. After hearing Jonah’s message, the king of Nineveh said regarding his people: “Let them cover themselves with sackcloth, man and domestic animal; and let them call out to God with strength and come back, each one from his bad way and from the violence that was in their hands.”—Jonah 3:6-8.*

¹⁵ Gross violence was not confined to Assyria. Edom, to the southeast of Judah, also faced retribution. Why? “As regards Edom, a wilderness of desolate waste it will become, because of the violence to the sons of Judah, in whose land they shed innocent blood.” (Joel 3:19) Did the Edomites take that warning to heart and end their violent ways? Some two centuries later, Obadiah wrote: “Your mighty men must become terrified, O Teman [an Edomite city], . . . Because of the violence to your brother Jacob,

* Some 22 miles southeast of Nineveh was Calah (Nimrud), which Ashurnasirpal rebuilt. The British Museum displays wall panels from Calah, about which we read: “Ashurnasirpal spared no detail of the ferocity and brutality with which he conducted his campaigns. Prisoners were hanged from poles or impaled on stakes at the walls of besieged cities . . . ; young men and maidens were flayed alive.”—*Archaeology of the Bible*.

. . . you will have to be cut off to time indefinite.”
(Obadiah 9, 10) What, though, about God’s people?

¹⁶ Amos revealed the situation in Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom: “‘See the many disorders in the midst of her and cases of defrauding inside her. And they have not known how to do what is straightforward,’ is the utterance of Jehovah, ‘those who are storing up violence and despoiling.’” (Amos 3:9, 10) You might think that it would be different in Judah, where Jehovah’s temple was located. But Habakkuk, who lived in Judah, asked God: “How long shall I call to you for aid from violence, and you do not save? Why is it that you make me see what is hurtful, and you keep looking upon mere trouble? And why are despoiling and violence in front of me?”—Habakkuk 1:2, 3; 2:12.

¹⁷ Could it be that violence became common among God’s people because they allowed themselves to be influenced by the attitude that Assyria,

16. Amos and Habakkuk give us insight into what problem existing in their day?

17. Why might a tendency toward violence have developed among God’s people?

Edom, or other nations had toward violence? Solomon had warned of such a possibility: “Do not become envious of the man of violence, nor choose any of his ways.” (Proverbs 3:31; 24:1) Later, Jeremiah was specific: “This is what Jehovah has said: ‘Do not learn the way of the nations at all.’”—Jeremiah 10:2; Deuteronomy 18:9.

¹⁸ If Habakkuk were alive now, would he not be appalled by the violence of our time? Many are steeped in violence from their youth on. Cartoons that enthrall boys and girls feature violence—one character tries to smash, blow up, or otherwise destroy another. Before long, many youths graduate to video games in which they win by shooting, exploding, or demolishing opponents. “Those are only games,” some may protest. Still, violent games played on a home computer or in a video arcade immerse players in violence, shaping their attitudes and reactions. How true the inspired counsel: “A man of violence

18, 19. (a) If Habakkuk were alive now, how might he feel about modern-day expressions of violence? (b) How do you feel about the violence of our time?

will seduce his fellow, and certainly causes him to go in a way that is not good”—Proverbs 16:29.

¹⁹ Though Habakkuk was forced to keep looking upon mere trouble and the “violence in front of” him, it grieved him. You might now ask, ‘Would he be comfortable sitting with me and looking at the programs I regularly watch on television?’ Ask also, ‘Would he set aside time to be a spectator at so-called sports events that are violent by design, players even wearing protective armor like that of ancient gladiators?’ With certain games, the thrill for many springs from fights on the court or the field or those between crazed fans. In some cultures, many watch violent films and videos centered on warfare or the martial arts. This may be excused as history or a display of the nation’s cultural past, but does that make the violence more acceptable?—Proverbs 4:17.

²⁰ Malachi brings up a related aspect when pointing out Jehovah’s view of the treachery of some Jews toward their wives. “‘He has hated a divorcing,’

20. About what sort of violence did Malachi express Jehovah’s view?

IN CONTRAST WITH THE WORLD

- What evidence do you observe that many in the world ‘drink violence’?—Proverbs 4:17; Zephaniah 1:9; Malachi 2:17.
- How can you apply Micah 4:3 in the congregation and in your family?
- How has this chapter helped you to see that we can draw lessons from parts of the Bible that are considered less often?

Jehovah the God of Israel has said; ‘and the one who with violence has covered over his garment.’” (Malachi 2:16) The Hebrew rendered “with violence has covered over his garment” has been variously understood. Some scholars take it to mean getting blood on one’s garment when violently attacking another. In any case, Malachi was plainly condemning spousal abuse. Yes, Malachi raised the issue of violence in a domestic context and showed that God disapproves of it.

²¹ Violence, physical or verbal, in the privacy of a
21. In what situations must Christians avoid violence?

Christian's home is no more excusable than violence in public; God observes both. (Ecclesiastes 5:8) While Malachi referred to violence against a wife, nothing in the Bible makes violence less reprehensible if a man directs it against children or elderly parents. Nor is it excusable if a wife displays it toward her husband, children, or parents. Granted, in a family of imperfect humans, tensions may arise, causing irritation and sometimes anger. Still, the Bible advises us: "Be wrathful, and yet do not sin; let the sun not set with you in a provoked state."—Ephesians 4:26; 6:4; Psalm 4:4; Colossians 3:19.

²² Some may make excuses for their violent ways, saying, 'I am this way because I grew up in a violent family,' or 'People from my area or culture are just more excitable, more explosive.' However, when Micah condemned 'rich men who had become full of violence,' he did not suggest that they could not help it because they had grown up amid violence. (Micah 6:12) Noah lived when the earth was "filled

22. How do we know that it is possible to avoid being violent, even if many around us are otherwise?

with violence,” and his sons grew up surrounded by it. Did they adopt violent ways? Hardly! “Noah found favor in the eyes of Jehovah,” and his sons followed him and were preserved through the Flood.—Genesis 6:8, 11-13; Psalm 11:5.

²³ Earth wide, Jehovah’s Witnesses are known, not for being violent, but for being peaceable. They respect and comply with Caesar’s laws against violent deeds. (Romans 13:1-4) They have worked “to beat their swords into plowshares,” and they strive to pursue peace. (Isaiah 2:4) They endeavor to put on “the new personality,” a help toward avoiding violence. (Ephesians 4:22-26) And they observe the fine example of Christian elders, who cannot be ‘smitters’ either in word or in deed.—1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7.

²⁴ Yes, we can—and must—deal with others as God desires. Hosea says: “Who is wise, that he may understand these things? Discreet, that he may know them? For the ways of Jehovah are upright, and the righteous are the ones who will walk in them.”—Hosea 14:9.

23, 24. (a) What helps us to avoid being known as violent people? (b) How does Jehovah feel about those who deal with others as he desires?

CONTRIBUTE TO FAMILY LIFE THAT PLEASES GOD

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES are well-known for enjoying a happy family life. Professor Bryan Wilson of Oxford University wrote: "The Witnesses offer a wide range of practical advice . . . on marital relations, moral issues, the rearing of children, and other practical matters. [They] have a great deal to offer by way of firm advice substantiated in Holy Writ and integrated into a coherent philosophy of life." Undoubtedly, you have personally learned much from God's Word about how to enjoy a wholesome family life.

² As the day of Jehovah draws near, Satan is attacking families in particular. Hence, many people have lost trust in members of their own family, as was so in the days of Micah. He wrote: "Do not put

- 1. Why do Jehovah's Witnesses in general enjoy a happy family life?**
- 2. (a) What have you observed about families in the world today? (b) In which books of the Bible are we going to look for some guidance about family life?**

your faith in a companion. . . . From her who is lying in your bosom guard the openings of your mouth. For a son is despising a father; a daughter is rising up against her mother; a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his household." (Micah 7:5, 6) You live in a world where the family arrangement has deteriorated, yet you have fought hard against being negatively influenced. Thus, your family life has been rendered more pleasant, more pleasing to God. Likely, you have applied such texts as Deuteronomy 6:5-9; Ephesians 5:22-6:4; and Colossians 3:18-21. Have you ever, though, viewed the books of the 12 prophets as a source of counsel on happy family life? In this chapter, we will note a few examples of such counsel in these books. But do not stop at just considering those specific points of counsel. Seek to discern from these examples a basic approach that you can use in drawing other lessons from these books. At the end of this chapter, some texts are cited that will give you practice in doing that, drawing lessons from those 12 books.

“HE HAS HATED A DIVORCING”

³ A logical first area of interest is the bond between husband and wife. Until recent times, most people did not consider divorce as an easy solution to marital problems. Obtaining a divorce was usually difficult; in 19th-century England, it required an act of Parliament to obtain a divorce. Such views tended to protect families from disintegrating. Now, though, things are quite different. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* observes: “Divorce rates have markedly increased in many countries since World War II . . . Attitudes toward divorce have changed dramatically . . . with the general trend toward tolerance of the practice.” Divorce is becoming a social phenomenon even in countries like Korea, where until a decade ago, divorce was frowned upon. Today, people in many lands feel that divorce is a viable option for mates in a troubled marriage.

⁴ During Malachi’s day in the fifth century B.C.E., divorce was rampant among the Jews. Malachi

**3, 4. (a) How do many people today try to solve their marital problems?
(b) What deplorable attitude toward marriage existed in Malachi’s day?**

told them: “Jehovah himself has borne witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you yourself have dealt treacherously.” Because of treacherous dealings on the part of husbands, the altar of Jehovah was covered with the tears of betrayed wives, “with weeping and sighing.” And corrupt priests condoned such cruelty!—Malachi 2: 13, 14.

⁵ How did Jehovah view the deplorable attitude toward marriage in Malachi’s time? “‘He has hated a divorcing,’ Jehovah the God of Israel has said,” wrote Malachi. He also affirmed that Jehovah ‘has not changed.’ (Malachi 2:16; 3:6) Do you see the point? God had earlier taken a position against divorce. (Genesis 2:18, 24) He did so in Malachi’s day. And he still does today. Some people may decide to walk out of their marriage simply because they are not satisfied with their mate. Treacherous though their heart may be, Jehovah searches through it. (Jeremiah 17:9, 10) He is aware of any deceit or ma-

5. (a) How does Jehovah view divorce? (b) Why is acting treacherously toward one’s marriage mate so serious?

licious scheming behind a divorce, however one may rationalize it. Yes, “all things are naked and openly exposed to the eyes of him with whom we have an accounting.”—Hebrews 4:13.

⁶ Your marriage may not be facing the crisis of a divorce, yet you do well to keep in mind Jehovah’s view. No one is perfect, so we can expect difficulties and disagreements in marriage. However, would you consider divorce an option, an easy way out? In the heat of a dispute, would you mention the possibility of a divorce? Many have, but the divine view of the marriage bond recommends that people try more seriously to make their marriage work. Granted, Jesus Christ said that there is one legitimate grounds for divorce—fornication, that is, all types of sexual intercourse outside of marriage. Apart from that, what was the thrust of Jesus’ admonition? He told listeners: “What God has yoked together let no man put apart.” Yes, Jesus upheld Jehovah’s unchanging standard, which Malachi

6. (a) How can having Jehovah’s view of divorce help you? (b) What was the thrust of Jesus’ advice about divorce?

had mentioned some 450 years earlier.—Matthew 19:3-9.

⁷ How, then, can Christian mates maintain a strong bond? Malachi provided this key: “You must guard yourselves respecting your spirit, and you must not deal treacherously.” (Malachi 2:16) That means watching the impelling inclination that we have within ourselves. If we are ‘guarding our spirit,’ we will shun temptations to give undue attention to anyone who is not our spouse. (Matthew 5:28) For example, what if we inwardly enjoy receiving the attentions of or flattery from someone else of the opposite sex? This would mean that we are lowering our guard as respects our spirit. Hence, a key lesson from the 12 prophets that will contribute to our enjoying a strong marriage bond is to give attention to ‘our spirit.’

⁸ No doubt you are determined to keep your marriage intact. Still, you are not immune to problems in married life. How can you best deal with any that

7. In harmony with admonition found in the book of Malachi, how can you maintain a strong marriage bond?

8, 9. Why was the episode of Hosea and Gomer included in the Bible?

arise, especially if you feel that most of the fault lies with your mate? Remember what was mentioned earlier in this book, in Chapters 2 and 4, about Hosea. His wife, Gomer, became “a wife of fornication” and then ‘chased after her passionate lovers.’ Later she was forsaken, becoming impoverished and enslaved. Hosea took Gomer back at a cost, and he was urged to love her. Why? To depict graphically what was taking place between Jehovah and Israel. Jehovah was a “husbandly owner,” and his people were joined to him as a wife.—Hosea 1:2-9; 2:5-7; 3:1-5; Jeremiah 3:14; Isaiah 62:4, 5.

⁹ From early times, the Israelites hurt Jehovah’s feelings by following after other gods. (Exodus 32:7-10; Judges 8:33; 10:6; Psalm 78:40, 41; Isaiah 63:10) The northern ten-tribe kingdom was especially reprehensible for calf worship. (1 Kings 12:28-30) In addition, the Israelites did not rely on their Husbandly Owner, Jehovah, but, rather, looked to political lovers. At one time, like an obstinate zebra in heat, they went after Assyria. (Hosea 8:9) How would you feel if your mate acted that way?

¹⁰ By Hosea's time, over 700 years had passed since the Israelites had come into a covenant relationship with Jehovah. Nevertheless, God was willing to forgive them, provided that they returned to him. Hosea is thought to have started prophesying before 803 B.C.E., so Jehovah's forbearance continued for some 60 more years for Israel and almost 200 years for Judah! Using Hosea's family situation as an illustration, Jehovah was still inviting his covenant people to repent. He had legitimate reasons to terminate his marriage with Israel, yet he kept sending prophets to help his figurative wife come back, even at a cost to himself.—Hosea 14:1, 2; Amos 2:11.

¹¹ If you faced a marital situation in which your mate appeared to be in the wrong, would you react as Jehovah did? Would you initiate efforts to restore your marriage to its former condition? (Colossians 3:12, 13) Doing so requires humility. What a wonderful example Jehovah set in his dealings with the Israelites! (Psalm 18:35; 113:5-8) God 'spoke to the Israelites' heart,' even pleading with them. As imperfect

10, 11. How can you imitate Jehovah if you faced a marital situation in which your mate appeared to be in the wrong?

humans, do we not have greater reason to speak to our mate's heart, striving to resolve problems and overlook mistakes? Significantly, Jehovah's efforts brought some results. A remnant of the nation opened their heart while in the wilderness of their exile in Babylon, and they later returned to their homeland, calling Jehovah "My husband."—Hosea 2: 14-16.*

¹² In the event that a serious problem arises, your genuine efforts to restore your relationship with your mate may well bear fine fruit. God was willing to forgive even the gross sin of spiritual fornication on the part of his figurative mate. Most marital problems among true Christians have not reached such a crisis. Many problems start with harsh or hurtful words. So if your mate's stabbing words have caused hurt feelings, consider what Hosea, and Jehovah himself, went through. (Proverbs 12:18) Might that not help you to forgive?

* In a case where a Christian's mate is guilty of adultery, the innocent partner has to decide whether to forgive or not.—Matthew 19:9.

12. In what way can your meditating on Jehovah's handling of his figurative wife benefit your marriage?

BY WAY OF REVIEW

- In building up your family, what lessons can you learn from Malachi 2:16?
- How did Jehovah handle the situation when his figurative wife betrayed him? —Hosea 3:1-5.
- What can one do to restore a marital relationship after a serious error? —Hosea 2:2.

¹³ There is yet another aspect of this historical account. Was God willing to restore his relationship with his people while they kept committing fornication? God told Hosea about the adulterous nation: “She should put away her fornication from before herself and her acts of adultery from between her breasts.” (Hosea 2:2) The people needed to repent and “produce fruit that befits repentance.” (Matthew 3:8) In this regard, focus on your own shortcomings rather than those of your mate. If you have wronged your mate, why not seek to restore the relationship

13. What lesson can we learn from the fact that Jehovah required repentance on the part of his wayward people?

by sincerely apologizing and changing your course? You may be rewarded with forgiveness.

“THE CORDS OF LOVE” —A BASIS FOR GIVING DISCIPLINE

¹⁴ Regarding family life, we can learn even more from Jehovah’s dealings with the Israelites as mentioned in the 12 prophets. Those books contain indications as to how to help your children. To say the least, bringing up children today is not easy. Parents must take their responsibility seriously. We read: “‘The day that is coming will certainly devour [people],’ Jehovah of armies has said, ‘so that it will not leave to them either root or bough.’” (Malachi 4:1) In that day of accounting, young children (boughs) will be dealt with justly according to Jehovah’s assessment of their parents (roots), who are responsible for minor children. (Isaiah 37:31) How parents are living may decide the future of their young ones, either for good or for bad. (Hosea 13:16) If you (the root) are not maintaining a good standing with

14, 15. (a) In view of Malachi 4:1, why should you take seriously the responsibility of teaching your children? (b) How can you help your children get to know Jehovah?

Jehovah, what may happen to your young ones (the boughs) on the day of his fury? (Zephaniah 1:14-18; Ephesians 6:4; Philippians 2:12) Conversely, your faithful efforts to have God's approval can benefit your young ones.—1 Corinthians 7:14.

¹⁵ After quoting Joel's prophecy regarding the need to call on the name of Jehovah, the apostle Paul wrote: "How will they call on him in whom they have not put faith? How, in turn, will they put faith in him of whom they have not heard?" (Romans 10:14-17; Joel 2:32) Paul was speaking about our public ministry, but you can apply the principle to teaching your children. How can they put faith in Jehovah without hearing about him? Do you spend enough time from day to day teaching your children how good Jehovah is, engendering in them deep love for him and his guidance? It is likely that young ones will thrive if they constantly hear about Jehovah in the family environment.—Deuteronomy 6:7-9.

¹⁶ When children are very young, it may be relatively easy to get them to Christian meetings. How

16. In line with Micah 6:3-5, how can you imitate Jehovah when disciplining your children?

ever, as they grow older, they begin to have a mind of their own. How can you deal with your children if occasionally they show rebellious tendencies? You can learn from the 12 prophets, noting how Jehovah dealt with Israel and Judah. (Zechariah 7:11, 12) For example, as you read Micah 6:3-5, consider its tone. The Israelites were in the wrong; still God addressed them as “my people.” He pleaded: “O my people, remember, please.” Instead of harshly accusing them, he tried to reach their hearts. Can you imitate Jehovah even when disciplining your children? However in the wrong they may have been, treat them as an integral part of your family, not addressing them in demeaning terms. Rather than condemning them, make tender pleas. Ask questions to draw them out. Strive to reach their heart so that they open up. —Proverbs 20:5.

¹⁷ Why do you discipline your children? Some parents do it because they do not want the family’s reputation jeopardized. Jehovah showed the motive behind his discipline, declaring: “I taught Ephraim to

17, 18. (a) What should motivate you to discipline your children? (b) How can you maintain “the cords of love” with your children?

walk, taking them upon my arms . . . With the ropes of earthling man I kept drawing them, with the cords of love.” (Hosea 11:3, 4) In this instance, Hosea likens the relationship between Jehovah and Israel to that of a father and a son. Can you picture a loving parent, leading the child with cords in hand, trying to help a wobbly infant to walk? The cords are a support if the baby stumbles, a guide when he wanders.—Jeremiah 31:1-3.

¹⁸ Will you imitate God’s love for the Israelites? Again and again they turned their back on him, but he did not quickly let go of those cords of love. Young ones may seem inclined to stray at times and to stumble over little things, but try to maintain the ties of love between you and them. Bear in mind that Jehovah was not blinded by favoritism to overlook the wrongdoing of his people. He faced the situation squarely, lovingly disciplined them, and took the time to make needed help available. If you note that your son or daughter seems to be drifting from the way of the truth, do not ignore that. Try to lead him or her back, as if with guiding cords, providing

warm help during this problematic period. Spend time with your troubled children. This cannot be overemphasized—spend time with them!

¹⁹ Hosea foresaw that a remnant of Israelites would accept discipline: “The sons of Israel will come back and certainly look for Jehovah their God, and for David their king; and they will certainly come quivering to Jehovah and to his goodness in the final part of the days.” (Hosea 3:5) Yes, God’s disciplinary action worked with a remnant of his people. Be optimistic that this will be so with your children. Try to see the good in them. Be kind when you talk to them yet firm in holding to Bible principles. Even if a wayward child does not respond favorably now, who knows when he may come to his senses?

BEWARE OF BAD ASSOCIATIONS!

²⁰ What can you young ones learn from the 12 prophets? One of the most-quoted scriptures in discussions between you and your parents may be 1 Corinthians 15:33 about avoiding bad associations.

19. Why should you not give up on your children?

20. What question regarding associations can young ones find answered in the books of the 12 prophets?

‘But is being friends with those who do not worship Jehovah really that bad?’ some of you might wonder. Well, you can find the answer to that question in these 12 books.

²¹ While the books of the 12 prophets were directed mainly toward God’s people, the book of Obadiah addressed the Edomites, who had been referred to as the Israelites’ brothers.* (Deuteronomy 2:4) Unlike most of the other books of the 12 prophets, Obadiah uses the pronoun you in reference to the Edomites. Now think about the Edomites. The time is about 607 B.C.E. when Jerusalem is being besieged. Although the Edomites are blood relatives of Jacob, they team up with the Babylonians! “Lay it bare! Lay it bare!” the Edomites jeer. (Psalm 137:7; Obadiah 10, 12) They plan to take over the land of Judah. They even eat food with the Babylonians, which in the Orient can indicate that the two parties are in a covenant relationship.

* The other exception is the book of Nahum, directed to the Ninevites.

21-23. (a) What can young people learn from the course the Edomites took? (b) Who really are your friends?

²² Notice what Obadiah foretells about the Edomites: “The very men [the Babylonians] in covenant with you have all deceived you. The men at peace with you have prevailed against you. Those eating food with you will place a net under you as one in whom there is no discernment.” (Obadiah 7) What actually happened to the Edomites, who deserted their brother, Jacob, and chose as companions the Babylonians? Eventually, the Babylonians under Nabonidus destroyed the Edomites. By Malachi’s day, God had made the mountains of Edom a desolated waste and Edom’s inheritance for the jackals. —Malachi 1:3.

²³ Now think about your so-called friends who do not worship Jehovah. Have you not observed that ‘the very boys [or girls] in covenant,’ or bonds of friendship, often deceive one another and “place a net under” their so-called friends? If the deception comes to light, what do they say? They might consider the friends they deceived to be naive, not discerning enough to see through another’s wiles. How like the Babylonians with their companions, the

Edomites! Do you feel that such “friends” would really care about you when you faced problems? (Obadiah 13-16) On the other hand, think of Jehovah God and his people today. Jehovah is always there to help you. He will sustain you through difficult periods. His people too prove to be ‘true companions loving all the time,’ like faithful ones “born for when there is distress.”—Proverbs 17:17.

VALUE THE MOST IMPORTANT BOND OF ALL

²⁴ Yes, family ties are important and worth strengthening. We can draw numerous lessons about them from the 12 prophets. You may want to go through those books and apply the method we have used here. This will enable you to draw from them even more lessons about improving your family life. Still, is having a happy family life the matter of foremost importance for God’s worshippers today?

²⁵ Interestingly, with regard to the coming of Jehovah’s day, Joel prophesied: “Gather the people together. Sanctify a congregation. . . . Let the bride-

24, 25. What must be foremost in our life?

HOW CAN YOU BENEFIT?

- How can you benefit from the following scriptures?

Hosea 11:3, 4;

Obadiah 7;

Micah 6:3-5;

Malachi 4:1

- As illustrated in this chapter, how can you use the following texts to improve your family life?

Hosea 14:4;

Joel 1:3;

Malachi 2:11, 12

groom go forth from his interior room, and the bride from her nuptial chamber.” (Joel 2:15, 16) Everyone in the household was to be gathered together for the worship of Jehovah. Even the newlyweds, who are naturally distracted, were no exception! Nothing should come ahead of our gathering to God. With the day of Jehovah fast approaching, having a good standing with him must be foremost in our life. In the final section of this book, we will consider what we should joyfully be doing today.

S E C T I O N 4

AWAIT JEHOVAH'S DAY WITH JOY

Jehovah used his prophets to warn about what is ahead—the outpouring of his anger. But we should not think of him as an angry God. He is “joyful over [his people] with happy cries.” While keeping in expectation of his great day, we have every reason to “rejoice and exult with all the heart.” (Zephaniah 3:14, 17) How can you manifest this in your actions and attitude? And why can you be thankful for what you consider from the 12 prophetic books?

JEHOVAH WANTS PEOPLE TO GAIN LIFE—DO YOU?

JEHOVAH was glad. The prophet was gloomy. God had mercifully spared the lives of thousands of people. Jonah would have let them perish! Jehovah chose to forgive and preserve those who had been his people's enemies.

² As we can see from Jonah's case, at times it may be hard for humans to grasp the scope of God's forbearance and to reflect His desire that people gain life. Jonah found Jehovah's decision to spare the Ninevites "highly displeasing, and he got to be hot with anger." Is it possible that Jonah was more concerned with his own feelings than with mercy and the saving of lives? He may have imagined that if the Ninevites were spared, he would lose face. (Jonah 4:1, 10, 11) What about our time,

1, 2. (a) What can we learn from Jonah's reaction to Jehovah's decision about Nineveh? (b) Why should we examine God's mercy and his view of life?

as Jehovah's day of judgment fast approaches? You might ask: 'How can I deepen my appreciation for God's forgiveness, and how can I help repentant wrongdoers to benefit more fully from his tenderness? Yes, how can I imitate God's desire that people gain life?'

JUSTICE AND MERCY WITH LIFE IN VIEW

³ Some people feel that these 12 prophetic books, page after page, talk about God's wrath and his punishing of people, his executing of justice. They might ask: 'Where is Jehovah's mercy? Does he care about saving lives?' In reality, rather than contradicting each other, God's justice and his mercy work together and contribute to the saving of lives. Justice and mercy are two facets of his perfectly balanced personality. (Psalm 103:6; 112:4; 116:5) By undoing the wrongs of the wicked, God is showing mercy toward the rightly disposed. That evidences his perfect *justice*. On the other hand, being fully just, Jehovah in his *mercy* allows for the limitations of imperfect hu-

3. Is there a contradiction between God's justice and his mercy? Explain.

mans. You might put it this way: judgment where needed, mercy wherever possible. In the prophets' messages, you can find many statements that bear out this perfect balance, showing that God wants people to gain life. Let us examine this and in the process find lessons that we can apply in practical ways today.

⁴ The prophet Joel conveyed a message of denunciation, yet he also confirmed that God “is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness.” (Joel 2:13) About a hundred years later, in the eighth century B.C.E., Micah stressed how much we need Jehovah’s forgiveness. After asking “Who is a God like you?” Micah described Jehovah this way: “He will certainly not hold onto his anger forever, for he is delighting in loving-kindness. He will again show us mercy.” (Micah 7:18, 19) As we can see from Jonah’s account of the Ninevites, God is willing to reconsider bringing punishment on objects of his wrath if they back up their remorse with works befitting repentance.

4. What evidence is there that God wants people to gain life?

⁵ We are not living in the time of the 12 prophets. Yet, are we not touched by such indications of Jehovah's mercy and his interest in saving lives? Your feeling that way can strengthen your attachment to God and increase your interest in helping others to gain life. Though most people today pursue a bad course, we are assured that God "does not desire any to be destroyed but desires all to attain to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) Such a desire on Jehovah's part is illustrated in the warm expressions uttered by Hosea upon receiving his adulterous wife back. Jehovah 'spoke to the heart' of his people. God was not obligated to show forgiveness, but he was willing to do so of his "own free will." (Hosea 1:2; 2:13, 14; 3:1-5; 14:4) Do you know why God's attitude and actions in this regard are so important? Because lives are involved. You can see further evidence of God's mercy and of his desire that people gain life when you look at the Christian congregation, which is doing something that you are involved in.

5. What aspects of God's mercy and his interest in saving lives do you find most heartwarming? (See also "They Made Themselves Available.")

HELPING PEOPLE GAIN LIFE

⁶ Why do you share in the public ministry? One main reason is so that you can help others come to know the true God. Here is something important to know about Jehovah: He provides clear warnings

6. In what key way does God show that he desires that people gain life?

THEY MADE THEMSELVES AVAILABLE

The 12 prophets were exceptional examples of individuals concerned about people's lives. They loyally carried their messages for the benefit of God's people and others, despite the sacrifices involved, the dangers encountered, and the threats received. In the ever-expanding earthly part of God's organization, there is an ongoing need for mature men who are willing to serve as elders and ministerial servants in the congregations worldwide. There is also an urgent need for more full-time ministers. Can you imitate the example of the prophets by offering yourself willingly, using your skills and abilities to do God's work both inside and outside the congregation? That is one of the finest ways to imitate Jehovah so that others can gain life.

before inflicting punishment. This shows his merciful interest in people, interest that they not die but, rather, gain life. The 12 prophets let wrongdoers know that God was offering them the opportunity to mend their ways and to escape his righteous anger. We are involved in a similar work today. As a Christian, you have the privilege of proclaiming the warning of God's coming day of vengeance. While you do that, avoid any feelings of vindictiveness, wanting to see unreceptive people "get what is coming to them." Remind yourself that to a large extent, you are preaching so that some can get on the road to life. —Joel 3:9-12; Zephaniah 2:3; Matthew 7:13, 14.

⁷ Every time you share Bible truths on the doorstep, at school, at your workplace, or elsewhere, you are offering help to a person who urgently needs God's mercy and forgiveness. (Hosea 11:3, 4) Granted, you may face apathy and indifference. Yet, by persevering despite that, you imitate our merciful God, who through Zechariah said to His wayward people: "Return, please, from your bad ways and

7. (a) Why is sharing in the witnessing work vital? (b) If we face apathy, how can thinking about Jehovah's attitude help us?

from your bad dealings.” (Zechariah 1:4) Who knows how many people might respond as you tell them about God’s mercy and point the way to life? Again, try to keep in mind that you are preaching because Jehovah wants people to gain life, and you do too.

⁸ You may find it heartening to call to mind this fact: There have almost always been people who respond to God’s messages. Thus, Hosea could speak of those who realized that “the ways of Jehovah are upright.” The prophet added: “The righteous are the ones who will walk in them.” (Hosea 14:9) Down through the centuries, many have been touched by God’s invitation: “Come back to me with all your hearts.” (Joel 2:12) That was said to a people who had known Jehovah, but it also reflects God’s interest in those who are just learning about him. Yes, God has not lost confidence in humans’ ability to feel sorry for their past wrong course, to repent, and to turn to doing what is right. That puts them in line for survival.—1 Timothy 4:16.

⁹ There is another element in Jehovah’s forgiving

8. Why is it heartening to recall how some have responded to God’s mercy?

9. The response of the Ninevites shows that what is necessary?

the Ninevites. We read that the people took the message of imminent divine judgment seriously, and they “began to put faith in God.” (Jonah 3:5) Faith, not merely fear of judgment, was necessary in order to keep living. Because of Jehovah’s keen desire to see people repent and act in faith, he has allowed us to be preachers helping people to make a choice. With what result? We read in connection with the Ninevites: “The true God got to see their works, that they had turned back from their bad way; and so the true God felt regret over the calamity that he had spoken of causing to them; and he did not cause it.” (Jonah 3:10) Jehovah cannot be deluded by mere words or token gestures. The Ninevites must have been genuine in their expression of remorse displayed by their works. God could see that they made a real change; they showed genuine repentance combined with faith.

¹⁰ Never should we conclude that Jehovah’s interest in saving lives benefited only the Ninevites. At Jerusalem’s destruction in 607 B.C.E.—after the ministry of Obadiah, Nahum, and Habakkuk—Jehovah

10. What were some situations in which Jehovah offered salvation?

provided escape for obedient Jeremiah and a group of his faithful companions. (Jeremiah 39:16-18) And God's prophets predicted that a repentant remnant would return from Babylon and restore pure worship. (Micah 7:8-10; Zephaniah 3:10-20) Those prophecies have had a grand fulfillment in modern times. After World War I, anointed Christians, many of whom had become lax as to true worship, were restored to zealous activity and to Jehovah's favor, with life in view. Today, too, people from "many nations" are becoming "joined to Jehovah." (Zechariah 2:11) These have the prospect of surviving the approaching end of this system of things. Hence, your public ministry is not a mere act of obedience that you do because Christians were so commanded. Nor is it something done just to fulfill prophecy. (Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20) The focus of your public ministry is helping people to learn about Jehovah, to exercise faith, and to gain life.

LIFE FOR THOSE RETURNING TO JEHOVAH

¹¹ Jehovah is interested in new ones and wants

11, 12. How can God's mercy benefit those who were once his worshippers?

them to gain life, yet he does not forget those who have already been serving him. We too should be interested in such ones and want them to continue in the way of life. In practical ways, how can we manifest our interest?

¹² You may know of some who learned about Jehovah, exercised faith in him, and became active in true worship but are not presently serving him. The messages Jehovah sent through the 12 prophets show that he was willing to extend mercy to those who were once among his people but who did not persist in true worship. The same is true today, whether such ones have drifted away, have been drawn away, or have fallen away into wrongdoing and need to repent. (Hebrews 2:1; 3:12) Though they may not be happy while away from Jehovah, they may find it difficult to return. God appeals to them, as in the words of his prophet: “This is what Jehovah of armies has said: ‘Return to me,’ is the utterance of Jehovah of armies, ‘and I shall return to you.’” (Zechariah 1:3) How reassuring are Hosea’s words! He says: “Do come back, O Israel, to Jehovah your God, for you

HAVE YOU DISCERNED?

- Why can you benefit by examining your own attitude toward mercy and compassion? —Jonah 4:1, 10, 11.
- How do Jehovah’s mercy and justice work together?—Hosea 2:19; Micah 7:9.
- What aspects of Jehovah’s forgiveness are exemplified by the case of the Ninevites? —Jonah 3:5, 9, 10; 4:2.

have stumbled in your error. Take with yourselves words and come back to Jehovah. Say to him, all you people, ‘May you pardon error; and accept what is good.’” Yes, even those who committed gross sins but who then returned to God in true repentance could experience forgiveness leading to full recovery. (Hosea 6:1; 14:1, 2; Psalm 103:8-10) That was so in the prophets’ days, and it is true in our day.

¹³ What, though, does that mean for Christians who have remained on the road to life? How can we show that we have Jehovah’s view of others? Jehovah

13. What reasons do we have to show mercy toward those whom God has forgiven?

expects us to show mercy, both to new ones and to those who may have lapsed in their service to him. God stated through Hosea what He wants from us: “In loving-kindness I have taken delight, and not in sacrifice.” Jesus Christ drew on those words and expressed the thought this way: “Go, then, and learn what this means, ‘I want mercy, and not sacrifice.’” (Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13) Our demonstrating such mercy is critical to maintaining our own relationship with God. Note how the apostle Paul linked being forgiving with imitating God: “Become kind to one another, tenderly compassionate, freely forgiving one another just as God also by Christ freely forgave you. *Therefore*, become imitators of God, as beloved children, and go on walking in love.” (Ephesians 4:32–5:2) How are you doing as to imitating God in this respect?

¹⁴ What if a brother who sinned gravely was unrepentant and had to be expelled from the congregation? Such a thing occurred back in the first centu-

14, 15. Under what type of circumstances may our attitude toward Jehovah’s forgiveness be tested?

ry; Christians who became unrepentant sinners had to be disfellowshipped. If that happened while Jesus' apostles were still present, it is not surprising that it occasionally happens today. In such cases, loyal ones in the congregation accept the Bible's direction not to associate with someone who has been expelled. Their loyalty to Jehovah may help the wrongdoer to see the seriousness of his wrong course, and he may be moved to repent. We read in the Bible that a man in Corinth who was expelled did later repent and turn around, and he was reinstated. (1 Corinthians 5: 11-13; 2 Corinthians 2:5-8) When that happens today, how do you feel, and how can you show your interest in others' gaining life?

¹⁵ A repentant wrongdoer may be ashamed and in despair, needing reassurance that both God and his brothers love him and want him to gain life. See how tenderly God reassured his ancient people who were willing to repent: "I will engage you to me in faithfulness; and you will certainly know Jehovah." (Hosea 2:20) Since that is how God feels, we should display that we are in harmony with the one whom

Zechariah described as the God who ‘*shows mercy.*’
—Zechariah 10:6.

¹⁶ God wants people to gain life, so he is glad when a sinner repents or a formerly inactive servant renews his zeal.* (Luke 5:32) In the case of the reinstated Corinthian man mentioned earlier, Paul exhorted the congregation to forgive and encourage him, letting him know that they really loved him: “This rebuke given by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that . . . you should kindly forgive and comfort him, that somehow such a man may not be swallowed up by his being overly sad. Therefore I exhort you to confirm your love for him.” (2 Corinthians 2:6-8) Remember that Hosea quoted Jehovah as saying regarding former sinners: “I shall heal their unfaithfulness. I shall love them of my own free will.” (Hosea 14:4) Will we imitate Jehovah, being happy to contribute to such healing and the everlasting life to which it can lead?

* Three heartwarming illustrations show God’s intense concern for those of his people who have strayed—the illustrations of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son.—Luke 15:2-32.

16. How should we react when someone is reinstated?

¹⁷ Jehovah makes it clear that he treats with dignity those who do return, accepting them back as full recipients of his love, just as Hosea readily received back his formerly unfaithful wife. Jehovah tells of the way he treated his servants: “I became to them as those lifting off a yoke on their jaws, and gently I brought food to each one.” (Hosea 11:4) How heart-warming is the affection by which Jehovah gently draws such returnees! We can imitate him by our not being rigid or cool toward one who manifested godly sadness and genuine repentance. Once he has been accepted back into the congregation, rather than displaying resentment or holding any grudge against him over his past errors, we should speak consolingly to him as needed.—1 Thessalonians 5:14.

¹⁸ Can you think of other ways to imitate Jehovah in connection with a disfellowshipping from the congregation? If someone had to be expelled, can we be of help to loyal ones in his family, perhaps a faithful mate and the children? They may be struggling to keep up their meeting attendance and ministry. Will

17, 18. How can we lovingly assist those who have returned to Jehovah or family members of one who has been disfellowshipped?

we give them the special support that they may need? Another way to show tender mercy is to use “good words, comforting words,” opening up encouraging conversation with such faithful ones. (Zechariah 1:13) There are many opportunities for that before and after meetings, while together in the ministry, or at other times. They are fellow workers, dear members of our congregation who should not feel shunned or isolated. In some cases, just the children of a disfellowshipped parent are striving to serve Jehovah. We truly want them to gain life. How can we show that?

“A FATHERLESS BOY IS SHOWN MERCY”

¹⁹ You can find a pattern of providing help in the ministry of Zephaniah, who served in the mid-seventh century B.C.E. He may have been of the royal family of Judah, possibly a distant cousin of King Josiah. The king’s father had been assassinated, forcing eight-year-old Josiah to the throne. He faced a challenging task: The nation was mired in idolatry

19. Zephaniah provided what spiritual assistance to one who might be compared to “a fatherless boy”?

and detestable practices. (Zephaniah 3:1-7) Young, fatherless Josiah needed skillful guidance and sound advice to rule that wayward nation. Jehovah provided wise direction through Zephaniah and other prophets, as was mentioned in earlier chapters of this book. Significantly, while Jehovah through his prophet spoke against “the princes” of Judah, He did not criticize the king himself. (Zephaniah 1:8; 3:3) This may indicate that young King Josiah had already shown himself to be inclined toward pure worship. The prophet’s admonition undoubtedly helped Josiah to galvanize his determination to purge Judah of unclean worship.

²⁰ Zephaniah’s interest in Josiah illustrates for us Jehovah’s interest in needy, vulnerable young ones, such as children whose parent may have been disfellowshipped. Hosea declared: “By [God] a fatherless boy is shown mercy.” (Hosea 14:3) Do you know of any other “fatherless” boys and girls in need of spiritual and practical mentoring? They might

20. How can spiritual mentoring help “fatherless” ones in the congregation?

HOW CAN YOU BENEFIT?

- How can those who have seriously sinned benefit from God’s mercy?—Hosea 3:3; 4:2; 14:4.
- What are some specific ways in which you can show loving-kindness within the congregation?—Hosea 11:4; Zechariah 1:13.
- Why is compassion vital in assisting those in need?—Zephaniah 3:16, 17.

be spiritual orphans, children of single-parent families, or young ones who serve Jehovah without the support of their family. Quite often, the extent to which such ones stay close to the congregation and go on to mature spiritually is affected by the presence or absence of a spiritual mentor. Many “a fatherless boy” has blossomed into a balanced, spiritual adult after being shown loving interest by mature Christians in the congregation.—Psalm 82:3.

²¹ A single mother, for example, may be helped if mature Christians show interest in her children. (James 1:27) While showing due respect for headship

21. Mature Christians can offer what assistance to young ones?

and consideration for propriety, overseers and others can offer spiritual support to members of disadvantaged families. Perhaps you and your mate or family can spend time with a fatherless boy or girl. Can you act in a considerate way toward young ones who might be plagued by loneliness? They may need empathy and confidential talk, which you could give ear to while sharing with them in the public ministry. You are no doubt busy, so your rendering such help to a young one with regularity over a period of time can be “a test of the genuineness of your love.” (2 Corinthians 8:8) Your efforts will reflect your interest in others’ gaining life.

²² How reassuring it is to reflect on God’s interest in people, his wanting them to gain life everlasting! He would rather display his affection for righteous people who love him and grant them life than express his displeasure toward those who choose to be irreformable and unworthy of everlasting life. As we eagerly await the day of Jehovah, let us imitate him in helping others get on the way to life.

22. How do you feel about Jehovah’s interest in others’ gaining life?

“KEEP IN EXPECTATION OF IT”

HOW long have you been waiting for Jehovah’s day to rid the earth of wickedness? How long are you willing to wait for it? Meanwhile, what attitude and resulting actions will mark your life? Clearly, your answers will differ from those of churchgoers who are living just as they please, waiting to go to heaven.

² While you are awaiting that great day, the books that the 12 prophets wrote can be of significant help. Many of those prophets lived when a judicial intervention from God was impending. For instance, Micah served when the punishment of Samaria at the hands of the Assyrians in 740 B.C.E. was approaching. (See the time line on pages 26 and 27.) Later in the stream of time, but just as certain, was the day of Jehovah against Judah. Since Micah did not know exactly when God would act, did he conclude that he should just sit and do little, hoping that God would act soon? Here are Micah’s words: “As

1, 2. (a) What questions might you ask yourself? (b) In what situation did some of the 12 prophets live, and what attitude did Micah have?

for me, it is for Jehovah that I shall keep on the lookout. I will show a waiting attitude for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me.” (Micah 7:7) Yes, confident of what was coming, Micah was like an active sentry on a watchtower.—2 Samuel 18:24-27; Micah 1:3, 4.

³ Next, locate Zephaniah and Habakkuk on the time line. Note that these two served in a period closer to the destruction of Jerusalem in 607 B.C.E. Still, they could not know whether God’s execution of judgment was right at hand or decades away. (Habakkuk 1:2; Zephaniah 1:7, 14-18) Zephaniah wrote: “‘Keep yourselves in expectation of me,’ is the utterance of Jehovah, ‘till the day of my rising up to the booty, for my judicial decision is . . . to pour out upon them my denunciation, all my burning anger.’” (Zephaniah 3:8) And what about Habakkuk, who lived soon after Zephaniah? Habakkuk wrote: “The vision is yet for the appointed time, and it keeps panting on to the end, and it will not tell a lie. Even if it should delay, keep in expectation of it; for it will without fail come true. It will not be late.”—Habakkuk 2:3.

3. With the destruction of Jerusalem ahead of them, Habakkuk and Zephaniah manifested what outlook?

⁴ The contexts of the pronouncements at Zephaniah 3:8 and Habakkuk 2:3 are revealing. At a time when certain Jews were saying, “Jehovah will not do good, and he will not do bad,” Zephaniah proclaimed “the day of Jehovah’s anger.” On that day both enemy nations and wayward Jews would feel God’s displeasure. (Zephaniah 1:4, 12; 2:2, 4, 13; 3:3, 4) Do you imagine that Zephaniah was fearful of God’s denunciation and anger? On the contrary, he was to keep himself “in expectation.” “What of Habakkuk?” you might wonder. He also was to “keep in expectation of it.” You are right to conclude that Zephaniah and Habakkuk were not casual about what lay ahead, carrying on as if they thought things would never change. (Habakkuk 3:16; 2 Peter 3:4) As noted, though, a significant point that these two prophets had in common was that both were to “keep in expectation.” And you know this: What those two prophets expected became historical fact in 607 B.C.E. So their keeping “in expectation” proved to be the course of wisdom.

4. In what contexts did Zephaniah and Habakkuk prophesy, and with what attitude?

⁵ You can be equally sure that “the day of Jehovah’s anger” against the present system of things will come; it will be a fact, actual and trustworthy. Surely you have no doubt about that. Like Zephaniah and Habakkuk, you do not know exactly when that day will come. (Mark 13:32) Yet, come it will, and fulfillment of Bible prophecy in your time strongly indicates that it will come soon. Thus, what Jehovah stressed to those prophets applies to you—“Keep in expectation of it.” And remember this absolute truth: Ours is the only God who “acts for the one that keeps in expectation of him.”—Isaiah 64:4.

⁶ You can show the proper attitude of expectation, demonstrating by what you do that you are confident that “the day of Jehovah’s anger” will come exactly on time. Your being convinced of that and matching your conviction with fitting actions are in harmony with something Jesus said. He urged the apostles and all anointed Christians: “Let your loins be girded and your lamps be burning, and you yourselves be like men

5, 6. Given where we are in the outworking of God’s purpose, what attitude should we have?

waiting for their master . . . Happy are those slaves whom the master on arriving finds watching! Truly I say to you, He will gird himself and make them recline at the table and will come alongside and minister to them.” (Luke 12:35-37) Yes, a proper waiting attitude shows confidence that Jehovah’s great day will come not a moment later than he has purposed.

“IN EXPECTATION” AND “READY”

⁷ God’s modern-day servants were in expectation before God’s Kingdom was established in heaven in 1914 and have been since then. Their expectation has definitely not meant idleness. On the contrary, they have kept active in their God-assigned witnessing work. (Acts 1:8) Reflect on this, though: If the great day of Jehovah had occurred back in 1914, what would your situation have been? Even if it had occurred 40 years ago, were you then a person of “holy acts of conduct and deeds of godly devotion”? (2 Peter 3:11) And what of your family members who are Witnesses or your very close friends in the congregation? Clearly, this period of expectation

7, 8. (a) What has been the result of God’s patience? (b) Peter urges us to manifest what attitude?

has opened to you and many like you the way of salvation, as 2 Peter 3:9 shows. The fact that Jehovah did not destroy the entire wicked system immediately after the Kingdom was established has permitted many to repent, even as the Ninevites were able to repent and be spared. We all have reason to echo the apostle Peter's words: "Consider the patience of our Lord as salvation." (2 Peter 3:15) And this present period continues to allow individuals to repent or to make adjustments in their life and thinking.

⁸ Admittedly, a Christian could think of the situation that prevailed in the days of Micah, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk with a somewhat detached interest. "After all," he might say, "it was such a long time ago!" But what lessons are there for us? We have already mentioned Peter's counsel about Christians' needing to be persons of "holy acts of conduct and deeds of godly devotion." Right after those words, Peter stressed another need—our need to be "awaiting and keeping close in mind the presence of the day of Jehovah." (2 Peter 3:11, 12) Hence, we should be "keeping close in mind" that day, being "in expectation of it."

⁹ Whether we have been serving Jehovah for a few years or for many decades, are we ‘keeping on the lookout and showing the same waiting attitude’ that Micah showed? (Romans 13:11) Granted, as humans, we might long to know when the end will come and how much time remains until that event. Yet, we simply cannot know. Recall Jesus’ words: “If the householder had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have kept awake and not allowed his house to be broken into. On this account you too prove yourselves ready, because at an hour that you do not think to be it, the Son of man is coming.”—Matthew 24:43, 44.

¹⁰ What Jesus said sounds very similar to what Micah, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk wrote. Yet, Jesus was making the point, not for people of ancient times, but for his followers, for us. Many devoted Christians have truly applied Jesus’ counsel; they have ‘proved themselves ready,’ remaining in expectation. The apostle John was a good example of this. He was one of the four on the Mount of Olives who asked Jesus about the conclusion of the system of things. (Matthew 24:3; Mark 13:3, 4)

9. Why is ‘keeping on the lookout’ appropriate for us?

10. What lessons do you learn from the apostle John’s life and outlook?

POINTS FOR REFLECTION

- What central point about your attitude do you draw from Micah 7:7; Habakkuk 2:3; and Zephaniah 3:8?
- Why is the counsel found at James 5:10, 11 important for and useful to you?
- How can you benefit from meditating on 2 Peter 3:9, 11, 12, 14?

That was in the year 33 C.E., but John could not look at any time line to determine just how soon things would happen. Now, in your mind, move ahead some 60 years in time. John had aged, but he did not become weary and lose his sense of expectation. On the contrary, when he heard Jesus say: “Yes; I am coming quickly,” John responded: “Amen! Come, Lord Jesus.” John did not regret how he had spent his years. He was convinced that when Jehovah executes judgment, He would also reward each one according to his works. (Revelation 22:12, 20) Whenever that judgment would be, John wanted to be “ready,” as the Lord Jesus had advised. Do you feel the same?

“IN EXPECTATION” OR “SATISFIED”?

¹¹ Consider another lesson that we can draw from the prophets who lived in a period when the executions of Jehovah’s judgments, first against Israel and then against Judah, were approaching. While Micah ‘kept on the lookout and showed a waiting attitude,’ many around him did not. They became “haters of what is good and lovers of badness.” Micah warned that if they would not change, they could ‘call to Jehovah for aid, but he would not answer them.’ (Micah 3:2, 4; 7:7) Micah’s contemporary Hosea used farming vocabulary when urging those in the northern kingdom of Israel: “Sow seed for yourselves in righteousness; reap in accord with loving-kindness. Till for yourselves arable land, when there is time for searching for Jehovah.” Despite that, most would not listen. They “plowed wickedness,” so unrighteousness is what they reaped. (Hosea 10:12, 13) They condoned or shared in corrupt practices, ‘trusting in their own way’ rather than in Jehovah’s way. Some today might wonder, ‘How could that happen to true worshippers living right there in the Promised

11. How did people of Micah and Hosea’s day differ from those men?

Land?’ Hosea showed that their problem centered on an attitude like the attitude that we need to guard against if we are to keep in expectation of Jehovah’s great day. That is, of becoming settled and “satisfied.”

¹² After God’s people entered the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey, they enjoyed considerable prosperity. How did they react? Hosea conveyed Jehovah’s words: “According to their pasturage they also came to be satisfied. They became satisfied and their heart began to be exalted. That is why they forgot me.” (Hosea 13:6) Centuries earlier, God had warned his people of that very danger. (Deuteronomy 8:11-14; 32:15) Nonetheless, by the days of Hosea and Amos, the Israelites succumbed—“they became satisfied.” Amos gives us specific details. He notes that many had luxurious furnishings in their houses, and some families even had second homes. They had the best of foods, drank fine wine from select vessels, and applied “the choicest oils” to their skin, perhaps as scented cosmetics. (Amos 3:12, 15; 6:4-6) You likely recognize that none

12. (a) Hosea identified what undesirable development among the Israelites prior to 740 B.C.E.? (b) The people’s becoming “satisfied” was manifested in what ways?

of those aspects of life were improper in themselves, but giving them too much importance was clearly wrong.

¹³ Granted, not all in the northern kingdom became prosperous and “satisfied.” Some were poor and had to struggle to make a living and feed their family. (Amos 2:6; 4:1; 8:4-6) The same is true today in many parts of the earth. Did God’s counsel found at Hosea 13:6 apply to even the poor in ancient Israel, and does it apply today? Yes, indeed. Jehovah was showing that whether a true worshipper is prosperous or not, he needs to guard against becoming so focused on the material aspects of life that he ‘forgets God.’—Luke 12:22-30.

¹⁴ From our vantage point in time and with so much Bible prophecy now fulfilled, we have added reason to be alert, ready, in expectation. What, though, if we have been in expectation for some time, perhaps decades? In the past we exerted ourselves in the ministry and made personal decisions that reflected our conviction that Jehovah’s day was not far off. But it has not yet come. How is our sense of expectation holding up? To make it quite

13. What basic defect was found in the Israelites, whether they were prosperous or not?

14. Why is it fitting for us to reflect on our sense of expectation?

personal, ask yourself, ‘Is my sense of expectation still intense, or has it cooled off considerably?’—Revelation 2:4.

¹⁵ We might gauge our sense of expectation in many ways, but why not use the very aspects found in Amos’ description of people of his day who “became satisfied”? As we examine that, we can analyze whether we detect in ourselves any tendency toward ‘becoming satisfied.’ A Christian who in years past reflected his sense of expectation in his thinking and actions might begin to strive to have a more luxurious home or automobile, the very latest style of clothing, expensive cosmetics and jewelry, or choice wine and rich food. The Bible nowhere suggests that we must be ascetics, deprived of reasonable pleasure. The man who works hard “should eat and indeed drink and see good for all his hard work.” (Ecclesiastes 3:13) However, the danger exists of a Christian’s focusing ever more on food, drink, and personal appearance. (1 Peter 3:3) Jesus noted that a shift in focus occurred with some anointed ones in Asia Minor, proving that this is a danger for Christians.

15. What are some indications that our sense of expectation may have waned?

(Revelation 3:14-17) Has something similar happened in our case? Are we ‘becoming satisfied,’ perhaps preoccupied with material things? Has our sense of expectation waned?—Romans 8:5-8.

¹⁶ A dampening of our expectation of Jehovah’s great day could reveal itself in the advice we give to our children or to others. A Christian could reason within himself: ‘I chose to forgo educational or career possibilities because I felt that the end was very close. Now I want to be sure that my children get the training that will allow them to have a comfortable life.’ Perhaps some in Hosea’s day had similar thoughts. If so, would their giving parental advice that centered on a “satisfied” lifestyle have been in their children’s best interests? And if children back then had in fact pursued a “satisfied,” or comfortable, way of life, what would their situation have been in 740 B.C.E., when Samaria fell to the Assyrians?—Hosea 13:16; Zephaniah 1:12, 13.

LIVE WITH VALID EXPECTATIONS

¹⁷ Like true worshippers of old, we can be confident

16. Why would it not be in our children’s best interests to encourage them to strive for a “satisfied” way of life?

17. In what way should we imitate Micah?

that what God promised will be fulfilled on time, at his appointed time. (Joshua 23:14) The prophet Micah was wise to show a waiting attitude for the God of his salvation. With our historical perspective, we can look at a time line of his period and see how near Micah lived to the time when Samaria was conquered. What about us and the time in which we live? When we look back on our life, will it be clear that we made wise choices, such as those about a secular career, a lifestyle, and the full-time ministry? Granted, we do not know “that day and hour.” (Matthew 24:36-42) There is no question, though, that we are acting wisely if we cultivate an attitude like that of Micah and act accordingly. And when Micah is rewarded with life in a restored earthly paradise, how pleased he will be to know that we have benefited from his prophetic message and faithful example! We will have become living proof that Jehovah is the God of salvation!

¹⁸ Our confidence has a solid basis. Think, for example, about the short prophetic book of Obadiah. It centered on ancient Edom, setting out Jehovah’s judgment

18, 19. (a) To what coming calamity did Obadiah point? (b) How did Obadiah hold out hope to Israel?

against that people who mistreated their “brother,” Israel. (Obadiah 12) The foretold devastation did take place, as we discussed in Chapter 10 of this book. The Babylonians under Nabonidus conquered Edom in the middle of the sixth century B.C.E., and Edom as a nation ceased to be. There is, though, another important thought in Obadiah’s message, a thought that bears on our keeping in expectation of Jehovah’s great day.

¹⁹ You know that the enemy nation (Babylon) that devastated Edom had also carried out God’s punishment of his unfaithful people. In 607 B.C.E., the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and carried the Jews off into exile. The land then became a desolate waste. Did matters end there? No. Through Obadiah, Jehovah foretold that the Israelites would repossess their land. At Obadiah 17, you can read this encouraging promise: “In Mount Zion is where those escaping will prove to be, and it must become something holy; and the house of Jacob must take possession of the things for them to possess.”

²⁰ History confirms that what Jehovah said through Obadiah did occur. God foretold it, and it happened.

20, 21. Why should Obadiah 17 be comforting to us?

Thousands of exiles from Judah and Israel returned in 537 B.C.E. With Jehovah's blessing, the repatriates transformed a wasteland into what became a verdant paradise. You have read at Isaiah 11:6-9 and 35:1-7 prophecies of that marvelous transformation. Of key importance was that true worship was reestablished, centered at a rebuilt temple of Jehovah. Thus Obadiah 17 can serve as another proof to us that Jehovah's promises are reliable. They are always fulfilled.

²¹ Obadiah concluded his prophecy with these emphatic words: "The kingship must become Jehovah's." (Obadiah 21) Trusting that, you are awaiting the glorious time when Jehovah through Jesus Christ will rule with no opposition in the entire universe, our planet included. Whether you have been in expectation of Jehovah's great day—with resulting blessings—for a short time or for many decades, you can be absolutely sure that such Bible-based expectations are going to be realized.

²² It is appropriate, then, to repeat Habakkuk's assurance, which certainly applies in our time: "The vision is

22. Why do you want your outlook to reflect that of Habakkuk 2:3 and Micah 4:5?

HOW WILL YOU BENEFIT?

- Whether you are wealthy or poor, what lessons ought you to draw from Amos 3:15; 5:11; and Haggai 1:4-7?
- What conflict is there between being satisfied and keeping in expectation?—Habakkuk 3:17, 18.
- Why is it imperative that you maintain a keen sense of expectation?—Zephaniah 1:12-15.

yet for the appointed time, and it keeps panting on to the end, and it will not tell a lie. Even if it should delay, keep in expectation of it; for it will without fail come true. It will not be late.” (Habakkuk 2:3) Even if from a human standpoint it might seem that Jehovah’s great day has delayed, his day will without fail come on schedule. Jehovah promises us that. Thus, those who have served God for years and those who have taken up his worship recently can move forward together with confidence like that expressed at Micah 4:5: “We, for our part, shall walk in the name of Jehovah our God to time indefinite, even forever.”

“PROCLAIM THIS, YOU PEOPLE, AMONG THE NATIONS”

HAVE you ever heard a lion roar? Its roar is said to be louder than the sound of a jackhammer. What would you do if you heard a lion roar nearby in the stillness of the night? Probably react without delay. Amos, one of the 12 prophets whose writings we are considering, used this analogy: “There is a lion that has roared! Who will not be afraid? The Sovereign Lord Jehovah himself has spoken! Who will not prophesy?” (Amos 3:3-8) If you heard Jehovah himself speak, would you not react as Amos did? He immediately took action and prophesied against the ten-tribe nation of Israel.

² You might say, ‘But I am not a prophet!’ You may feel rather unqualified because you have not received formal training as a prophet. Yet, remember

1. Why can Jehovah’s speaking to his prophet be likened to a lion’s roaring?

2. (a) How can you imitate Amos in fulfilling the commission to prophecy? (b) What are we going to consider in this chapter?

Amos. When confronted by the calf-worshipping priest Amaziah, Amos said: “I was not a prophet, neither was I the son of a prophet; but I was a herdsman and a nipper of figs of sycamore trees.” (Amos 7:14) Though his background was humble, Amos was willing to fulfill his commission as a prophet for Jehovah. How about you? Do you realize that you have been given an assignment similar in some respects to that of the 12 prophets? You are to declare God’s message for today as well as to teach and make disciples. How do you view that serious assignment? What is the message you are to proclaim among the nations? How thorough are you in accomplishing that assignment? What determines whether your work is successful? Let us consider the answers.

‘THE YOUNG BULLS OF YOUR LIPS’

³ Are you really involved in a work like that of the prophets? You may not have heard the lion roar in the sense that you have been directly inspired by Jehovah. You have, though, heard from his Word, the

3. How can you be involved in a work similar to that of the prophets whose writings we are studying?

Bible, the urgent message about the impending day of Jehovah. As we noted in Chapter 1 of this book, the words “prophet” and “prophetic” have a variety of meanings. Although you may not be a prophet in the sense that Amos or the other ancient prophets were, you can still speak out about the future. How? You can declare the prophetic messages that you have studied in the pages of the Holy Scriptures, including those of the 12 prophets. Now is the time for doing just that.

⁴ Look at the matter from another standpoint. Jehovah God told the prophet Joel of a time when people of every sort would prophesy, so to speak: “After that it must occur that I shall pour out my spirit on every sort of flesh, and your sons and your daughters will certainly prophesy. As for your old men, dreams they will dream. As for your young men, visions they will see.” (Joel 2:28-32) On the day of Pentecost 33 C.E., the apostle Peter applied this passage to the pouring out of holy spirit upon those who were gathered in an upper chamber in Jerusalem and

4. In what sense is the prophecy at Joel 2:28-32 being fulfilled today?

to their subsequent preaching of “the magnificent things of God.” (Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-4, 11, 14-21) Now consider our time. Joel’s prophecy has been undergoing its major fulfillment since early in the 20th century. Spirit-anointed Christians—male and female, old and young—began to “prophesy,” that is, to declare “the magnificent things of God,” including the good news of the Kingdom, now established in the heavens.

⁵ Though not begotten by holy spirit to be sons of God, “a great crowd” of “other sheep” are telling the anointed followers of Jesus Christ: “We will go with you people, for we have heard that God is with you people.” (Revelation 7:9; John 10:16; Zechariah 8:23) Whether you have the hope of everlasting life in the heavens or on the earth, you have the privilege of offering “the young bulls of [your] lips.” (Hosea 14:2) What does that expression in Hosea’s prophecy mean? “Young oxen . . . were the best animals for thank-offerings,” says Bible scholar C. F. Keil. The

5. (a) What privilege do we all have? (b) What does offering “the young bulls of [your] lips” mean to you and for you?

apostle Paul referred to Hosea 14:2, writing: “Let us always offer to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips which make public declaration to his name.” (Hebrews 13:15) Yes, the expression “the young bulls of our lips” refers to the very best of our lips, the words we speak in praise of Jehovah.

⁶ You bring to Jehovah sacrifices of praise when you offer heartfelt prayers to him, make appreciative comments about him at Christian meetings, and talk to others enthusiastically in the public ministry. Each of us might ask, though, ‘When I participate in such activities, what is the quality of my offering?’ From what you have studied, you have no doubt come to disdain the priests of Malachi’s day who blatantly brought defective animals to God’s altar. Jehovah through Malachi had to emphasize to them the poor quality of their sacrifices, for they did not feel that they were despising the table of Jehovah. (Malachi 1:8) Accordingly, we do well to examine the quality of our sacrifices to ensure that they are the very best and are not defective in some way.

6. Why should we examine the quality of our sacrifices of praise?

THE MESSAGE TO BE PROCLAIMED

⁷ Offering “the young bulls of our lips” in the ministry demands courage, does it not? That is because the message we take to people is twofold, and one of its aspects surely is not a popular one. The prophet Joel told God’s people: “Proclaim this, you people, among the nations, ‘Sanctify war! Arouse the powerful men! Let them draw near! Let them come up, all the men of war!’” (Joel 3:9) As it applies in our day, what a challenge that is to the nations! It is a declaration of Jehovah’s righteous war against God-defying people. Whereas Jehovah instructs his people to “beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning shears,” he tells the enemy nations to “beat [their] plowshares into swords and [their] pruning shears into lances.” (Micah 4:3; Joel 3:10) Yes, God’s enemies must prepare themselves to meet the Creator of the universe in war. That is no soothing message for us to deliver.

⁸ In the prophet Micah’s message, those who offer ‘the young bulls of their lips’ are likened to a lion.

7. Courage is required to proclaim what aspect of our twofold message?

8. Why are “the remaining ones of Jacob” likened to a lion?

He wrote: “The remaining ones of Jacob must become among the nations . . . like a lion among the beasts of a forest, like a maned young lion among droves of sheep, which, when it actually passes through, certainly both tramples down and tears in pieces; and there is no deliverer.” (Micah 5:8) Why this analogy? In our day, God’s people, with the anointed remnant taking the lead, must show lionlike courage in proclaiming the warning message to the nations.*

⁹ Are you courageous like a lion in proclaiming the warning aspect of the message? You may need such courage not only when you stand before people in authority but also when you talk to your peers at school or at work or to your unbelieving relatives. (Micah 7:5-7; Matthew 10:17-21) How can you muster up courage in the face of opposition or apathy? Listen to how Micah was able to accomplish the

* This prophecy may have had its first fulfillment during the Maccabean period when the Jews under the Maccabees expelled their enemies from Judah and rededicated the temple. This made it possible for a remnant of the Jews to welcome the Messiah when he appeared.—Daniel 9:25; Luke 3:15-22.

9. (a) When do you need to exercise lionlike courage? (b) How can you be courageous in the face of opposition or apathy?

formidable task of warning about the destruction of both Samaria and Jerusalem: “I myself have become full of power, with the spirit of Jehovah, and of justice and mightiness, in order to tell to Jacob his revolt and to Israel his sin.” (Micah 1:1, 6; 3:8) You too can “become full of power” because you too can receive an abundant supply of God’s empowering spirit. (Zechariah 4:6) By relying on God in prayer, you will be able to declare the words that may cause ears to tingle.—2 Kings 21:10-15.

¹⁰ You want to be courageous, but you should also be tactful in approaching people with the warning message. We need to be “gentle [or, “tactful”] toward all,” even when the message is about the impending “day of Jehovah.” (2 Timothy 2:24; footnote; Joel 2:1, 11; Zephaniah 1:14) Again, we can learn from the 12 prophets. They boldly declared judgment messages from Jehovah, yet they were considerate of those who would listen. For example, the prophet Zephaniah did not mince words when speaking to

10. How can we imitate Zephaniah in proclaiming the message about “the day of Jehovah”?

DID YOU GET THE SENSE OF IT?

- How can you offer ‘the young bulls of your lips’ today?—2 Kings 20:3; Malachi 1:11.
- What twofold message are you proclaiming?—Isaiah 61:2; Micah 5:7, 8.
- Why do you need lionlike courage in declaring the day of Jehovah?—Jeremiah 1:19; Joel 3:9-12.

the hardened princes (or, nobles) of his day, but he did not include faithful King Josiah in that criticism. (Zephaniah 1:8) When declaring the warning message, can we help people by viewing them as possible sheep, not assuming a negative view of them?—Matthew 25:32-34.

¹¹ What is the other aspect of the twofold message that we bear? We find that aspect highlighted in Micah chapter 5. “The remaining ones of Jacob must become in the midst of many peoples like dew from Jehovah, like copious showers upon vegetation, that

11. (a) What is the second aspect of the twofold message that we bear? (b) How can you imitate the 12 prophets when proclaiming the day of Jehovah?

does not hope for man or wait for the sons of earthling man.” (Micah 4:1; 5:7) Because of the good news that they bring to “many peoples” today, “the remaining ones” of spiritual Jacob, or Israel, and their companions are like refreshing “dew from Jehovah” and “copious showers upon vegetation.” We should be able to learn much from the last 12 books of the Hebrew Scriptures about this second aspect of our message, since those prophets proclaimed not only destruction but also restoration. In your ministry, are you emphasizing the positive aspect of the message about the day of Jehovah?

HOW DO YOU PROCLAIM THIS MESSAGE?

¹² How, then, are you proclaiming this twofold message? The prophet Joel likened the work of God’s people to a series of plagues by insects, including locusts. (Joel 1:4) But why do we say that Jehovah’s people are like, of all things, swarms of insects? Because, as found at Joel 2:11, God identifies these insects as “*his* military force.” (God’s people are sym-

12, 13. (a) What is the significance of God’s people being compared to swarms of insects? (b) How do you feel about what you read at Joel 2:7, 8?

bolized by locusts in the book of Revelation as well. See Revelation 9:3, 4.) The work of the insects that Joel described was like a devouring fire, and in their path what seemed like “the garden of Eden” was turned into “a desolate wilderness.” (Joel 2:2, 3) How can you show that you are aware of the significance of Joel’s prophecy?

¹³ Think about how thorough these little creatures are. Joel put it this way: “Like powerful men they run. Like men of war they go up a wall. And they go each one in his own ways, and they do not alter their paths. And one another they do not shove. As an able-bodied man in his course, they keep going; and should some fall even among the missiles, the others do not break off course.” (Joel 2:7, 8) No “wall” of opposition would deter them and the plague they were causing. “Should some fall even among the missiles,” as has been the case with loyal Christians who have been executed by oppressive enemies, others take over the work, accomplishing the mission that Jehovah has for them. Are you

determined to stick to the assignment of proclaiming the day of Jehovah until God sees that it has been accomplished? You may even be carrying on the work in the place of some faithful Christians who have died.

¹⁴ Thoroughness, that is the key. How can you personally contribute to the thoroughness of the preaching work as described in Joel's prophecy? By participating in the house-to-house ministry and then returning to teach those who have shown interest. You also call again to contact those who were not at home. Thus you demonstrate understanding of this prophetic picture. And when you witness to people on the street, you might meet those whom you could not otherwise reach. Here is another avenue: You may be able to help people in your neighborhood who have immigrated from other countries.* Are you alert to all such opportunities, contributing to the thoroughness of the preaching work today?

* The booklet *Good News for People of All Nations*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses, has been successfully used in helping people who do not speak the major language of your area.

14. In what way can you contribute to the thoroughness of the preaching work?

WHAT DETERMINES YOUR SUCCESS?

¹⁵ How do people respond to the message about the fear-inspiring day of Jehovah? You should not be surprised to encounter opposition or apathy. Such was the case with many of God’s prophets, most of whom had strong warning messages to convey. (Jeremiah 1:17-19; 7:27; 29:19) Despite that, a number of prophets saw positive results! At least five of them—Jonah, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Zechariah—were able to move the hearts of some people to repent of their past sins and change their course.

¹⁶ Zephaniah’s work as a prophet apparently moved King Josiah to initiate a revival of pure worship. Micah boldly proclaimed a judgment message against the head ones of Judah, and King Hezekiah’s actions harmonized with Micah’s words. (Micah 3:1-3) Interestingly, some older men of Jeremiah’s day referred to Hezekiah’s response as a good example when they said that the king ‘feared Jehovah and proceeded to

15. What is noteworthy about people’s response to the messages of the 12 prophets?

16. What fruitage did Micah’s efforts as a prophet bear?

soften the face of Jehovah.’ (Jeremiah 26:18, 19; 2 Kings 18:1-4) Under Hezekiah’s leadership, the people of Judah and willing ones from the northern kingdom celebrated the Passover and the Festival of Unfermented Cakes, even extending the festival for an additional week. What was the result of their return to true worship? “There came to be great rejoicing in Jerusalem.” (2 Chronicles 30:23-26) Micah had started to proclaim God’s message of doom to the apostate nation under King Ahaz. Yet, the prophet was able to see the fine fruitage of his efforts when Ahaz’ son Hezekiah responded well.

¹⁷ Consider also the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. They served the repatriated Jews, who had become apathetic and self-centered. (Haggai 1:1, 2; Zechariah 1:1-3) By the time the two prophets took up their assignments, 16 years had passed since the foundation of the temple had been laid. People were “on the run, each one in behalf of his own house” while Jehovah’s house was “waste.” Haggai called out to the Jews: “Be strong, all you people of the

17. What were Haggai and Zechariah able to accomplish?

land,' is the utterance of Jehovah, 'and work.'" What happened then? Jehovah proceeded to "rouse up the spirit" of Governor Zerubbabel, High Priest Joshua, and "all the remaining ones of the people." As a result, they were able to finish the work on the temple.—Haggai 1:9, 12, 14; 2:4.

¹⁸ Most of the 12 prophets declared messages to the nation originally dedicated to Jehovah. We may be preaching to people who have never known the true God, but we can still learn from the results of the prophets' activities. Today, too, in many territories, people are responding to the urgent message about the day of Jehovah. We are seeing results such as those foretold by Zechariah: "Many nations will certainly become joined to Jehovah in that day, and they will actually become my people; and I will reside in the midst of you." (Zechariah 2:11) At present, in a literal sense, God's people are finding a response among "many nations." (Revelation 7:9) Zechariah predicted: "Many peoples and mighty

18, 19. (a) How are people in some lands responding to the proclamation of the day of Jehovah? (b) How will you respond to the need to declare the warning message to all people?

nations will actually come to seek Jehovah of armies in Jerusalem and to soften the face of Jehovah.” They are described as “ten men out of all the languages of the nations” who would take hold of the skirt of a spiritual Israelite, saying: “We will go with you people, for we have heard that God is with you people.”—Zechariah 8:20-23.

¹⁹ Note the reference to “all the languages of the nations.” The Bible and Bible literature are being translated into many languages, and Jehovah’s Witnesses are training ministers to teach people of “all the languages of the nations.” (Matthew 28:19, 20; Acts 1:8) You may have learned another language to help people in your own area who speak that tongue. And quite a number have been willing to learn a new language or two and to move to countries where many eagerly respond to the good news. Would it be possible for you to move to such productive territories and thus ‘proclaim this among the nations’? Consider that prayerfully. If you are raising a family, make the possibility of such a move a subject of

repeated family discussion, keeping that goal before your growing children.

²⁰ Another prophet who had a hearing audience, a very unlikely one at that, was Jonah. The men of Nineveh, even the king himself, responded favorably to Jonah's message, putting faith in Jehovah. God himself asked: "Ought I not to feel sorry for Nineveh the great city, in which there exist more than one hundred and twenty thousand men who do not at all know the difference between their right hand and their left?" (Jonah 4:11) Think about those words in connection with what moves you to proclaim to others the fear-inspiring day of Jehovah. Do you feel indebted to Jehovah for saving you by means of the ransom? Do you feel a sense of responsibility as a dedicated servant of Jehovah? (1 Corinthians 9:16, 17) These are valid reasons for proclaiming the day of Jehovah. In addition, though, do you "feel sorry" for the people to whom you proclaim the day of Jehovah? How happy you can be when godlike mercy moves you to talk to people about that day!

20. What attitude did Jehovah call attention to regarding the people of Nineveh?

²¹ We do not know much about the responses received by Joel, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Malachi. We do know at least one response that Amos received. Amaziah strongly opposed Amos, accusing the prophet of conspiring against the king and trying to ban Amos from preaching in Bethel. (Amos 7:10-13) Amos courageously met the opposition. Today, too, religionists may try to influence some political leaders to persecute Jehovah's people or even to ban their beneficial preaching work. Will you imitate Amos in boldly proclaiming the good news despite opposition?

²² Although the 12 prophets experienced varied responses, all fulfilled their commission. The important thing is, not that people respond to the twofold message we carry, but that we bring to Jehovah "the young bulls of our lips," our very best "sacrifice of praise." (Hosea 14:2; Hebrews 13:15) Then we can leave the results up to God. He will draw out those who are truly sheep. (John 6:44) Furthermore, you

21. What can you learn from the example of Amos in dealing with Amaziah's threat?

22. Why can you say that the ministry is successful in your territory?

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND?

- What lesson can you learn from God’s people being compared to swarms of insects?—Joel 1:4; 2:3; Acts 20:24.
- How can you show that you are aware of the need to be thorough in your ministry?—Amos 7:14, 15; Micah 1:1-4; Acts 10:42.
- Why can you be confident that your proclaiming of the day of Jehovah is a success in God’s eyes?—Malachi 3:10.

can be successful as a proclaimer of the divine message regardless of how people respond. You can rest assured that “the feet of one bringing good news, one publishing peace,” are beautiful in the eyes of those who appreciatively accept the good news. But more than anything else, they are beautiful in Jehovah’s eyes. (Nahum 1:15; Isaiah 52:7) With the great day of Jehovah so close, be determined to continue doing what Joel foretold for our time: “Proclaim this, you people, among the nations, ‘Sanctify war! Arouse the powerful men!’” That means God’s war against the nations.—Joel 3:9.

“A BLESSING UNTIL THERE IS NO MORE WANT”

OURS is a time of judgment and of blessing. It is a period of religious decay and of spiritual restoration. Surely you should want the blessing as well as the present and future good effects of the spiritual restoration! But how can you be assured of these? The answer involves a prophecy that had its major fulfillment soon after “the last days” began in 1914. (2 Timothy 3:1) Malachi foretold: “‘There will come to His temple the true Lord [Jehovah], whom you people are seeking, and the messenger of the covenant in whom you are delighting. Look! He will certainly come,’ Jehovah of armies has said.”—Malachi 3:1.

² This prophecy that has crucial significance in your life is found in the last of the 12 prophetic books. As we conclude our discussion of them, what Malachi wrote is of particular note. His book includes vital instruction

1, 2. (a) What beneficial choices can each one of us make? (b) The fulfillment of what prophecy has a bearing on the blessings we can enjoy?

that allows you and others of Jehovah’s servants to receive “a blessing until there is no more want.” (Malachi 3:10) Let us take a closer look at chapter 3 of Malachi’s book.

THE TIME FOR SPIRITUAL CLEANSING

³ Some five centuries after Malachi’s time, Jehovah, represented by Christ (God’s “messenger of the [Abrahamic] covenant”), came to the literal temple in Jerusalem to judge His covenant people. In general that nation had proved unworthy of continued favor, so Jehovah rejected it. (Matthew 23:37, 38) You can see proof of that in what occurred in 70 C.E. You can be just as sure that God chose instead “the Israel of God,” a spiritual nation of 144,000 taken from all nations. (Galatians 6:16; Romans 3:25, 26) Yet, that was not the final outworking of Malachi’s prophecy. It also points to modern times and has a direct bearing on your future prospects for “a blessing until there is no more want.”

⁴ The fulfillment of Bible prophecy confirms that in

3. What development among God’s ancient people led to the choosing of “the Israel of God”?

4. What needed to be answered after Jesus was enthroned in 1914?

1914, Jesus Christ was installed as King of Jehovah's heavenly Kingdom. Then came the time for Jesus to identify a group of Christians who merited divine approval. Who would stand the test of spiritual purity? You can find the answer indicated in Malachi's words: "Who will be putting up with the day of his coming, and who will be the one standing when he appears? For he will be like the fire of a refiner." (Malachi 3:2) When and how did Jehovah come to his "temple" for judgment?

⁵ Obviously, God did not come to a temple of stone and mortar. The last such literal temple for true worship had been destroyed in 70 C.E. Rather, Jehovah came to a spiritual temple, the arrangement by which humans can approach and worship him on the basis of Jesus' ransom sacrifice. (Hebrews 9:2-10, 23-28) The churches of Christendom certainly did not constitute that spiritual temple, for they were part of a religious system guilty of bloodshed and spiritual harlotry, one that promoted false teachings rather than pure worship. Jehovah became "a speedy witness against" such,

5, 6. (a) When Jehovah came to his spiritual temple for inspection, what did he find among the majority of professed worshippers? (b) What did God's spirit-anointed servants need?

and you know that his adverse judgment was just. (Malachi 3:5) However, after God's Kingdom was established, there was a group of true Christians serving in the courtyards of God's spiritual temple who demonstrated their allegiance to God through severe trials. Nonetheless, even those anointed ones needed some purification. The writings of the 12 prophets pointed to such, for they contain heartwarming promises of spiritual and physical restoration among God's servants. Malachi foretold that there would be a people whom Jehovah would "clarify . . . like gold and like silver." They would "certainly become to Jehovah people presenting a gift offering in righteousness."—Malachi 3:3.

⁶ According to substantial evidence available, from 1918 onward Jehovah provided the needed cleansing for anointed Christians, purifying their worship, practices, and doctrines.* They and the "great crowd" who later joined them have greatly benefited. (Revelation 7:9) As a united group, they continue to present "a gift offering in righteousness" that is "gratifying to Jehovah."—Malachi 3:3, 4.

* For further information, see *The Watchtower* of June 15, 1987, pages 14-20.

⁷ That is true of God’s people collectively, but what about each of us individually? You might ask: ‘Are there aspects of my attitude and actions that still need refinement? Do I still need to refine my conduct, even as Jehovah has refined his anointed?’ We saw earlier that the 12 prophets highlighted negative views and conduct as well as positive traits and deeds. Their doing so has put you in a better position to know what Jehovah is “asking back from you.” (Micah 6:8) Note “from you.” That emphasizes why each of us should analyze whether some more refining or cleansing on a personal level is in order.

“TEST ME OUT, PLEASE”

⁸ Consider what Jehovah goes on to say through Malachi in chapter 3, verse 10. There you will find this warm invitation: “‘Bring all the tenth parts into the storehouse, that there may come to be food in my house; and test me out, please, in this respect,’ Jehovah of armies has said, ‘whether I shall not open to you people the floodgates of the heavens and actually empty

7. What can we appropriately ask ourselves about our standing with God?

8. What invitation has Jehovah extended to his people?

out upon you a blessing until there is no more want.’” That offer is extended to God’s people as a whole. Do you feel that it is also a personal invitation to you?

⁹ How can you give “the tenth parts” to Jehovah? Of course, you are not obliged to present literal offerings and tithes, such as prescribed under the Law. Offerings of a spiritual kind are what God now expects. As discussed in the preceding chapter, Paul described your witnessing work as an offering. (Hosea 14:2) The apostle then mentioned another type of sacrifice, writing: “Do not forget the doing of good and the sharing of [material] things with others, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” (Hebrews 13:15, 16) It is thus obvious that “the tenth parts” mentioned at Malachi 3:10 represent spiritual and material offerings. As a baptized Christian, you are fully dedicated to Jehovah, but your tithe represents the portion of what is yours that you are able to bring to Jehovah, or use in his service. It includes the time, energy, resources, and material contributions that you make available for use in Jehovah’s service.

9. What kind of offerings and tithes can you present to Jehovah?

¹⁰ How appropriate it is that you offer such symbolic tithes to Jehovah with feelings of devotion and love! A sense of urgency is also involved. You realize that the great day of Jehovah is fast approaching and that it is “very fear-inspiring.” (Joel 2:1, 2, 11) Lives are at stake. God extends an invitation that you can personally respond to. Jehovah asks you to ‘test him out.’ Of course, no lowly human should dare put Jehovah to the test as if God were untrustworthy. (Hebrews 3:8-10) But you can humbly test him in a proper sense. How? He promised a blessing. When you obey him, you make a test of God, as if asking ‘Will he bless me?’ In response, he puts himself under obligation to do so, keeping his promise. Thus, God’s allowing you to ‘test him out’ underscores your conviction that he will bless you abundantly.

¹¹ You can see that Jehovah’s people have made generous material offerings and spiritual sacrifices. And Jehovah has poured out “a blessing until there is no more want.” You may have observed that blessing being be-

10. In what sense can you fittingly ‘test Jehovah out’?

11, 12. What blessings from Jehovah upon his people have you personally witnessed?

stowed upon God's people, as reflected in the dramatic numerical growth that Jehovah's Witnesses have enjoyed from the early part of the 20th century down to our day. You have also seen a marked increase in the understanding of "the deep things of God." (1 Corinthians 2:10; Proverbs 4:18) Think, though, of this from another angle: How have you personally been impacted?

¹² At one time you may have been a church member, or you may have been one who had just begun attending the meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses. At that point, how much of the Bible's basic truths did you grasp? Now contrast that with what you have learned since then and can prove directly from the Scriptures. Or think of deeper things you have come to understand, including prophecies that are now being fulfilled. And consider your progress in applying certain Bible passages in practical aspects of life. What steps forward you have made! In your own case, you can say, as did the apostle Peter: "We have the prophetic word made more sure." (2 Peter 1:19) The point is: You have personally been "taught by Jehovah" and are among a people who practice real Christianity and want to serve

Jehovah forever. (Isaiah 54:13) Already you can validly say that he has greatly blessed you.

YOUR NAME IN THE BOOK OF LIFE

¹³ You find further blessings from Jehovah mentioned at Malachi 3:16: “At that time those in fear of Jehovah spoke with one another, each one with his companion, and Jehovah kept paying attention and listening. And a book of remembrance began to be written up before him for those in fear of Jehovah and for those thinking upon his name.” Both the anointed and those of the great crowd manifest this reverential “fear of Jehovah.” Do you not consider it a privilege to be one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, a part of a happy people who think upon Jehovah’s name and magnify it globally? How content you can personally be, having the assurance that Jehovah remembers your faithfulness!—Hebrews 6:10.

¹⁴ Yet, how can you as an individual qualify to have your name included in that “book of remembrance,”

13. How is it possible to have one’s name recorded in God’s book of remembrance?

14. How have the 12 prophets helped you to see what attitudes and practices Jehovah abhors?

HOW HAVE YOU BEEN AFFECTED?

- How have you benefited from the spiritual cleansing of Jehovah’s modern-day people? —Daniel 12:10; Malachi 3:12.
- Why do you want to increase the sacrifices that you offer to God?—Hosea 14:2; 1 Peter 2:5.

which is even now being written before Jehovah? Recall some of the wise counsel that we have found in the books of the 12 prophets. We gained insight into conduct, qualities, and attitudes that displease Jehovah. For example, the prophets alerted us to practices that God says conflict with his righteous standards and can ruin our lives, such as “loose conduct” and the “spirit of fornication.” (Hosea 4:12; 6:9) God detests those who deal treacherously with a mate or, by extension, other family members. (Malachi 2:15, 16) Jehovah inspired the prophets to emphasize that he takes no pleasure in violence, whatever its form. (Amos 3:10) He likewise had them highlight the need to avoid injustice or dishonesty in business and financial dealings. (Amos 5:24;

Malachi 3:5) And the 12 books stressed how important it is that men entrusted with authority not allow their judgment to be clouded by partiality or selfish interests.—Micah 7:3, 4.

¹⁵ The prophets, though, did more than draw our attention to things we ought to avoid. They spotlighted benefits we can enjoy by upholding God's standards. Our relationship with Jehovah will be more intimate. (Micah 4:5) Our congregation will be more stable and active when righteousness thrives. Our marriage will be stronger, and our family will be more united, more centered on spiritual things. (Hosea 2:19; 11:4) By acting justly and honestly, we will gain others' respect. In imitation of Jehovah's mercy, we will display compassion and loving-kindness and experience such in return from our brothers and sisters. (Micah 7:18, 19) Yes, we will be surrounded by spiritual people, brothers and sisters who love truth and peace, and above all, we will have gained Jehovah's friendship. (Zechariah 8:16, 19) Do you not agree that these are blessings that you already experience?

15. What are some fine benefits you will receive from following the exhortations of the 12 prophets?

¹⁶ As a result of what we have just considered, it is so true that “the distinction between a righteous one and a wicked one”—between true and false Christians—is plainer than ever. (Malachi 3:18) We are striving to measure up to Jehovah’s standards while the world in general descends deeper into a mire of ungodliness. And you know that this difference will have serious implications when “the great day of Jehovah” arrives. —Zephaniah 1:14; Matthew 25:46.

¹⁷ Clearly, then, the counsel of the 12 prophets is timeless. As you face specific challenges or decisions, you may want to review the practical information presented in the chapters of this book. Thus you can show your continuous desire to be instructed in Jehovah’s ways and to “walk in his paths.” (Micah 4:2) Walking in that way, however, involves more than the here and now. Your earnest desire is to have your name written in Jehovah’s book of remembrance permanently, is it not? The books of the 12 prophets can help you to that end.

16. What distinction is evident today, and what will this mean at Jehovah’s day of reckoning?

17. In the future, how can you use the information in this book?

FAITH LEADS TO SALVATION

¹⁸ Underscoring a major factor that can bring you God's lasting approval, Joel stated: "Everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will get away safe." (Joel 2:32) Two apostles, Peter and Paul, quoted this vital requirement. (Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13) Paul added another facet to that exhortation when he asked: "How will they call on him in whom they have not *put faith*?" (Romans 10:14) As for you, surely you want to call on the name of Jehovah and exercise faith in him now and forever!

¹⁹ Calling on Jehovah's name involves more than just knowing and using God's personal name. (Isaiah 1:15) The context of Joel 2:32 stresses true repentance and trust in Jehovah's forgiveness. (Joel 2:12, 13) Calling on God's name implies truly coming to know him, trust him, obey him, and put him first in our life. Yes, serving Jehovah becomes our top priority. That, in turn, greatly contributes to a satisfying and lasting life, which is a blessing from God.—Matthew 6:33.

²⁰ Jehovah stated through Habakkuk: "As for the

18. What vital requirement do you find at Joel 2:32, and what did the apostle Paul add to that requirement?

19. What is involved in calling on the name of Jehovah?

20. As you exercise faith, what marvelous reward becomes possible?

righteous one, by his faithfulness he will keep living.” (Habakkuk 2:4) Be sure to fix that deeply in mind and heart. It is one of the Bible’s central truths. Paul pointed to that scripture three times in his inspired writings.* (Romans 1:16, 17; Galatians 3:11, 14; Hebrews 10:38) This truth calls on you to exercise faith in the sacrifice that Jesus Christ offered for our sins. Jesus explained: “God loved the world so much that he gave his only-begotten Son, in order that everyone exercising faith in him might . . . have everlasting life.” We also read: “He that exercises faith in the Son has everlasting life.” (John 3:16, 36) That sacrifice provides for the healing that only our Redeemer can offer. After recording Jehovah’s statement of what His great day will do to Satan’s wicked world, Malachi continued: “To you who are in fear of my name the sun of righteousness will certainly shine forth, with healing in its wings.” Yes, Jesus will shine forth with healing. That involves the spiritual healing that we experience now. Yet, how thrilling it is to think that it will extend to full physical healing in the new world!—Malachi 4:2.

* Paul quoted from the Greek *Septuagint*, where the wording differs slightly from the Hebrew text.

²¹ It is also vital to put faith in God's ability to accomplish his will. In Micah's day, it was difficult to trust fellow humans. The prophet noted: "Do not put your faith in a companion. Do not put your trust in a confidential friend." Still, Micah had no problem trusting in Jehovah; neither should you. Micah stated: "As for me, it is for Jehovah that I shall keep on the lookout." (Micah 7:5, 7) Unlike unpredictable humans, Jehovah has the will and the power to fulfill his purpose for the vindication of his sovereignty and the lasting welfare of men of faith.

²² You can confidently echo Habakkuk's words: "I will exult in Jehovah himself; I will be joyful in the God of my salvation." (Habakkuk 3:18) The prophet Joel makes clear a reason for joy on the part of those calling upon Jehovah's name in faith: They "will get away safe" or, as Paul expressed it, "will be saved." (Joel 2:32; Romans 10:13) Safe, or saved, in what sense? Your exercising faith has already saved you from the crafty acts of Satan and the many

21. Why can you have faith in Jehovah's ability to accomplish his will?

22. Those calling upon the name of Jehovah in faith can experience what outcome?

painful experiences that the wicked must face. (1 Peter 1:18) More than that, though, you can look forward with confidence to salvation through the catastrophic end of this wicked system of things. That will open the way for you to enjoy a host of blessings that were pointed to by the 12 prophets.

GLIMPSES OF PARADISE

²³ There are lasting blessings in store for those “in fear of Jehovah.” (Malachi 3:16) Some of the 12 prophets provided vivid glimpses of the earthly Paradise just ahead, descriptions that can fill you with joy and anticipation. For example, Micah wrote: “They will actually sit, each one under his vine and under his fig tree, and there will be no one making them tremble.” (Micah 4:4) Truly, under God’s Kingdom, you will feel secure and will reap the fruits of your labor!

²⁴ It is not mere wishful thinking for you to look forward to the end of sickness, grief, and even death. Imagine the joy that will come to those raised back to life

23, 24. (a) What are some glimpses of Paradise offered by the 12 prophets? (b) How has your outlook on the future been affected by what the 12 prophets wrote?

with the prospect of attaining human perfection! They will experience in an extended way on earth what Hosea 13:14 points to: “From the hand of Sheol I shall redeem them; from death I shall recover them. Where are your stings, O Death? Where is your destructiveness, O Sheol?” Paul applied that verse to the heavenly resurrection.—1 Corinthians 15:55-57.

²⁵ It should not be too difficult to believe that an earthly resurrection will happen. (Zechariah 8:6) When Amos and Micah foretold that God’s people would return from exile, that may have seemed hard to believe. Yet, you know that it did happen. (Amos 9:14, 15; Micah 2:12; 4:1-7) The returnees responded: “We became like those who were dreaming. At that time our mouth came to be filled with laughter, and our tongue with a joyful cry. . . . Jehovah has done a great thing in what he has done with us. We have become joyful.” (Psalm 126:1-3) That is how you will feel in the new world upon experiencing “a blessing until there is no more want.”

²⁶ After “the day of Jehovah” cleanses the earth of

25. You will have what feelings in the new world?

26. What awaits those who live with Jehovah’s day in mind?

LIVE WITH JEHOVAH'S DAY IN MIND

- Why do you feel that it is vital to keep Habakkuk 2:4 in mind?—Hosea 2:18, 20.
- How have the 12 prophets heightened your expectations of the new world?—Psalm 126:1-3.
- Why are you determined to live with Jehovah's day in mind?—Joel 2:1, 2; Habakkuk 2:2, 3.

wickedness, “the kingship must become Jehovah’s” in a fuller sense. (Obadiah 15, 21) Will that not be a marvelous blessing for all his earthly subjects? And you can be among those to whom the words of Malachi chapter 3 will apply: “‘They will certainly become mine,’ Jehovah of armies has said, . . . ‘And I will show compassion upon them, just as a man shows compassion upon his son who is serving him.’” (Malachi 3:17) Clearly, your faithfulness, which now puts you in line to be saved, will then open to you “a blessing until there is no more want.” What a marvelous prospect!

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