

MINOR PROPHETS

FOR BEGINNERS

MAJORING IN MINORS

MIKE MAZZALONGO

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THE "FOR BEGINNERS" SERIES

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1.

Introduction

Let me begin our story of the Minor Prophets by stating two basic facts about them:

1. These 12 books are referred to as the Minor Prophets because of the length of their books and not because of the importance or legitimacy of the prophets who wrote them.

For example, when examining the major prophets, we see that:

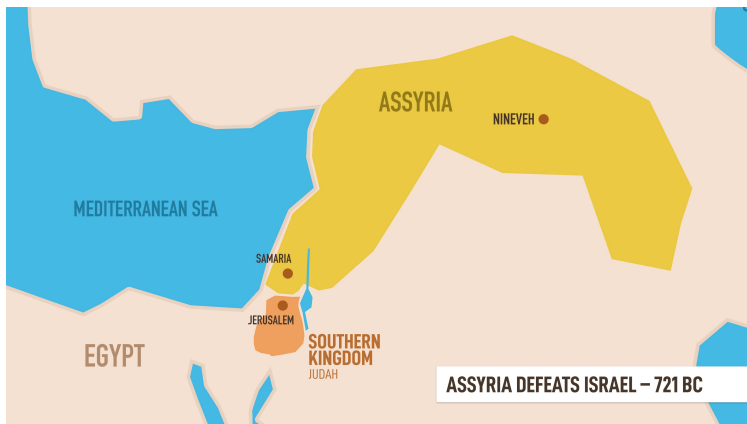
- Isaiah's book – 66 chapters
- Jeremiah's book – 52 chapters + Lamentations – 5 chapters = 57 chapters
- Ezekiel's book – 48 chapters
- Daniel's book - 12 chapters
- Average length of Major Prophets' Books = 46 Chapters

The average length of the 12 Minor Prophets' books is about 6 chapters. Therefore, minor because of the length, not because of importance or legitimacy.

2. Apparently, the name, "Minor Prophets" was coined by Augustine who referred to the longer books as major and the shorter books as Minor Prophets (Augustine 354-430 AD).

I. Minor Prophets – History/Timeline

In a general sense the Minor Prophets can be divided into three main periods:



721 BC

This the year that the Northern Kingdom of Israel was defeated by the Assyrian army and the Jewish people were carried off and relocated in various parts of the Assyrian Empire where they were eventually assimilated into foreign culture, foreign families, and pagan religions and practices. We know that from about 1000 BC to 900 BC the Jewish nation composed of 12 tribes descended from Jacob (Son of Isaac, Son of Abraham) and were eventually united under king Saul, then David and finally Solomon.



931 BC

When Solomon died in 931 BC a civil war broke out to decide who would reign over the 12 tribes. This led to a split in the United Kingdom with the two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) remaining loyal to Solomon's son, Rehoboam, who ruled what was then called the Southern Kingdom of Judah with its capital in the city of Jerusalem.

The other ten tribes located in the north also formed what was called the Northern Kingdom of Israel and led by one of Solomon's former officials, Jeroboam, who ruled from its first capital city, Shechem. The Northern Kingdom also had the city of Tirzah as capital and finally the city of Samaria which remained its capital until the kingdom was defeated by the Assyrians in 721 BC.

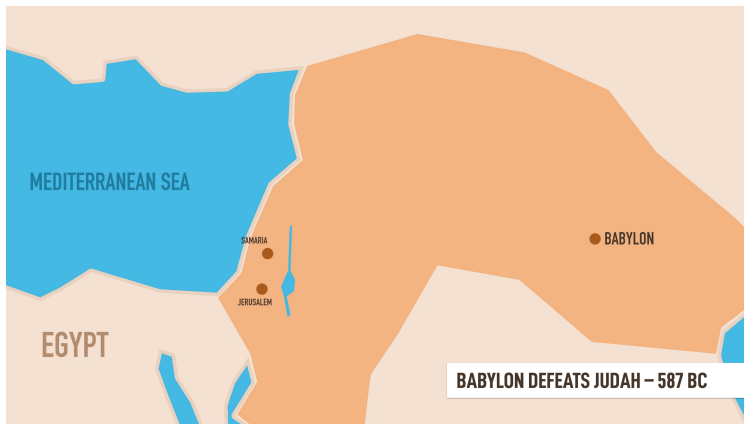
Therefore, from the death of Solomon in 931 BC to the destruction of the Southern Kingdom in 587 BC you had a divided kingdom lasting approximately 350 years with each kingdom, North and South, having 20 kings reigning over them.

The Northern Kingdom, because it was mainly absorbed by other cultures and religions, was never reestablished. The people were referred to as the lost tribes of Israel. Some returned to settle back in their ancient tribal territories but because they had mixed with other nations and pagan religions were no longer considered purely Jewish and referred to as Samaritans, the original name of the land and capitol of the northern tribes (Samaria). They continued to be mentioned in Jewish historical records right up to the time of Jesus (Woman at the well – John 4:4-42) but were never again included as part of the Jewish nation and not permitted to participate in temple worship. With time they were held in contempt by the Jews and the word Samaritan was used as a term of derision by Jewish people – "The Jews answered and said to Him (Jesus) 'Do we not say rightly that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?'" (John 8:48).

“ To the Orthodox Jew of the time, a Samaritan was more unclean than a Gentile of any other nationality.

-J.E. Talmage – Jesus the Christ.

Therefore, the area of the Northern Kingdom was eventually repopulated by mixed race Jews and referred to as Samaria.



587 BC

After its defeat in 587 BC by Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon, many of the Jewish survivors (artisans, craftsman, young nobles, young women, priests, Levites, temple officials, rabbis) were carried off into exile in Babylon.

Unlike the Assyrians, however, whose method with conquered peoples was to destroy their unity and culture by spreading them into foreign nations thereby eliminating them as a future threat. Therefore, the Northern Kingdom of the Jews never became a powerful nation again, even after many people returned to Samaria.

The Babylonians, however, built up their empire by re-educating and re-training their exiled captives for service to the Babylonian empire depending on education, skill, or trade (example – Daniel).

This enabled the Jewish exiles in the Southern Kingdom of Judah to maintain their culture and religion even while living in exile in

a foreign nation. It is during the years in Babylon that the Jews began to establish synagogues (Hebrew term for “house of prayer”) in order to continue organized worship since their temple in Jerusalem was destroyed.

The New Testament church is patterned after the Jewish synagogue where the activities were similar – teaching, prayer, praise, fellowship, and service. The main difference being that in the synagogue the high point was the reading from the Law or prophets often concerning the promise of a Messiah, and preparation for the keeping the feasts, especially the Passover. In the New Testament church, the high point is the commemoration of the coming of the Messiah and His atonement on the cross followed by His resurrection three days later.

In other words, the Jews worshipped in hope of a coming savior and many still do so today. We Christians, on the other hand, worship in thanksgiving for the Savior Who has come and presently wait for His return.

Make no mistake, despite the events in the news, their ancient customs and the seeming wisdom of their great religious teachers, as well as the bravery of their military and success in the world of art, science, and finance – the Jewish nation and religion continues to categorically and strongly deny that Jesus is their Messiah or the Son of God, and consciously strive to reject this idea. They are not sympathetic to Christianity and undermine its promotion when possible.

They rejected Jesus as Lord some 2,000 years ago and continue to do so today as a group although there are always a few who confess Christ in every generation. Of course, we have no prejudice against any nation including our Jewish neighbors, desiring that every nation hears and believes the gospel and that

all are baptized in His name and become as we are, disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Back to my main point, the Southern Kingdom maintained its cultural purity and religious practice even while in exile – and thus when Jeremiah's prophecy of their eventual return after 70 years was fulfilled, they were able to take advantage of this blessing.

'Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,' declares the Lord, 'for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation.

- Jeremiah 25:12

When the time for their return came about, they were not only ready, but actually able to reestablish a uniquely Jewish kingdom much like the one they had before they were sent into exile. The account of this return and reestablishment is recorded in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Let us look at a timeline of this period and assign the prophets who were sent by God to speak to the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, mainly warning of the calamities that were coming upon them because of their disobedient conduct.

Assigning the Minor Prophets according to this timeline helps us to remember them and their messages more easily than by simply memorizing the order that they appear in the Old Testament. Before doing this, however, I'd like to review and compare the Hebrew Bible with the Old Testament.

II. Organization of the Canon (Inspired Books):

A. The Hebrew Bible – Judaism

Torah – Instruction

- Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

Nevi'im – Prophets

Former

- Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings

Latter

- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel

Minor – Grouped in a single book

- Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zechariah, Haggai, Zephaniah, Malachi

Ketuvim – The Writings (Poetic)

- Psalms, Proverbs, Job

5 Megillot – Scrolls

- Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther

Historical

- Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles

Total – 24 books

B. The Old Testament – Christianity

Pentateuch

- Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

Historical

- Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I & II Samuel, I & II Kings, I & II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

Wisdom

- Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon

Prophetic

(Major)

- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel

(Minor)

- Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Total 39 books

C. Deuterocanonical I

These books are considered canonical (inspired) by Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, and the Assyrian Orthodox churches – but not by Jewish, Protestant, or Restoration (churches of Christ). "Oriental" refers to geographic location and includes Ethiopian, Coptic, Armenian, Syrian, Eritrean.

- Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, I & II Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Additions to Daniel

D. Deuterocanonical II

These books are considered canonical (inspired) by only orthodox churches.

- I & II Esdras, Prayer of Manasseh, Psalm 151, III & IV Maccabees, Odes

These additional books are included in most Catholic and Orthodox Bibles and provide information about the period of 400 years between the Old and New Testaments. They are often referred to as books of the Apocrypha or hidden books. They were rejected for inclusion in the New Testament canon (means – measure: which books measure up to a standard). They were not accepted in the canon because:

1. They lacked Apostolic authorship or authority (i.e. Luke was not an Apostle but he was a disciple of Paul, the Apostle. Mark was not an Apostle but was an early disciple of both Paul and Peter who were both Apostles chosen by Jesus.
2. Many books were rejected because they had errors or were too shallow in spiritual content to be included.

In any event, Jude tells us that we have the true body of faith given to the saints once for all – Jude 3; and Peter in II Peter 1:1-4 assures us that God has given us, in His word, everything we need for spiritual life.

We know that the Minor Prophets were accepted into the canon of the Hebrew Bible by 150 BC.

III. Minor Prophets – Timeline

An easy way to remember when the twelve Minor Prophets lived as well as the focus of their ministry is to know that they belong to one of three main periods and places.

1. Fall of the Northern Kingdom – 721 BC

Before the fall of the Northern Kingdom, God sent prophets to warn and encourage them to repent. There are many debates among scholars as to the dates when these prophets appeared but I leave them in the order that they are listed in the Hebrew Bible.

- Hosea – uncertain date or object of message
- Amos – from south but preached to north
- Obadiah – uncertain but included here
- Jonah - preached to the people of Nineveh (Capitol of the Assyrian empire).
- Micah – also from the south

2. Fall of the Southern Kingdom – 587 BC

In the same way, before the fall of the Southern kingdom, God sent prophets to warn them – in addition to providing the example of the Northern Kingdom's fall.

- Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah

3. Return of the exiles to Judea and Jerusalem – 538- 457 BC

When Jeremiah's 70-year prophecy was fulfilled and some of the exiles returned, God sent prophets to encourage, teach, and rebuke the people who had returned and had reinstated temple worship.

- Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

SUMMARY

We've looked at these Minor Prophets in two main ways so far.

1. Where their books are located in both the Hebrew and Old Testament canons.
2. When these men served in the history of the Jewish people and their particular role as God's prophets.

In the next chapter we will begin our review and summary of these books. In this course we will not be doing a line-by-line study of each Minor Prophet, but rather a summary of the content, history, main features, as well as information about the author and the purpose/message of each book finishing with some modern-day applications.

Hopefully, by the end of this study, if someone mentions the name of one of these prophets you'll know when he lived, who he preached to, his main message, and the particular features of his book.

For example: Hosea married a prostitute, Micah spoke of Jesus' birthplace, and Zechariah had a vision of a flying scroll.

In the end you'll not be experts, but you will be familiar with each book and where it fits into the whole, plus you'll finally have a good reason to begin reading the Minor Prophets. The plan is that you will read the books before reading this study guide, we will review and analyze the books in our study and then you will re-read the books to complete the process.

2.

The Call of the Prophet

The Hebrew prophets of the Old Testament (both Major and Minor Prophets) can serve as great examples to build faith, courage, and steadfastness for all of God's servants in any age. Even though this book will focus on the 12 Minor Prophets, similar lessons can be taken from the Major prophets whose life experience as prophets were, for the most part, similar to that of the Minor Prophets.

Our study of the 12 Minor Prophets will provide us with information concerning not only the men themselves but also the intimate relationship that bound them to the God of Israel whom they served and worshipped.

The point to note well, and the subject of this chapter, is the calling of these men directly by God into the dynamic role of "prophet."

Our study will outline several characteristics of the Divine call in order to gain insight, not only into the prophet himself, but also into the originator of every call, the Lord. In addition to this, we will review five similar elements contained in the writings of these prophets along with the outline and primary purpose of each their books.

Background

The words used to refer to the prophets in the Hebrew language:

ROEH = Seer

NAHBI = Spokesman; to bubble

These words were originally used in connection with those who practiced "nature" religions or ecstatic rituals in communicating with the spirits of the pagan world. There is a tendency to confuse the history of the word used in describing the Hebrew prophet with the actual practice of his ministry.

Originally, the word for prophet suggested elements of divination, magic, and ecstatic trances which were present in the Canaanite religion with which the Hebrews came into contact early in their settlement and ultimate conquest of the land. However, as the Hebrews evolved in their practice of the Jewish religion, the term prophet gained new meaning and significance with the rise and development of the Hebraic order. The word prophet came to be understood in light of the unique work of the Jewish prophet and the position or role he began to play in that society.

Hebrew prophecy, therefore, became the defining element that eventually separated the Israelite religion from other contemporary religions and gave it a survival value that these other pagan religions did not possess.

The power expressed through the Jewish prophet changed the original word and meaning of the expression used to refer to both the person and his work/ministry. No longer did it suggest a dark and mysterious nether world and associations with strange characters and unseen powers, but rather now described

the motivating factor that enabled the prophet to do and say as he did to the people of his time. This new factor was his genuine call by God to be His servant and spokesman. Hence, this ancient term referring to darkness and magic, in light of the Hebrew life and experience, came to mean, "to call."

(Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he used to say, "Come, and let us go to the seer"; for he who is called a prophet now was formerly called a seer.)

- I Samuel 9:9

This is an example of Samuel explaining to the people of his era the development of the word "seer" from its original root meaning in pagan times to the present meaning "to call" as a more apt description of the prophets that served in his day.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROPHET'S CALL

The prophets lived at different times with different circumstances but their calling into ministry was similar in that each calling had common characteristics:

1. The Call was Unique

In no other religion was there such a phenomenon. The nature religions claimed a relationship with the "spirit world", mediated through "shamans", witches, and various priests and magicians.

Other, more developed religious systems (Greek, Roman) had an elaborate panoply of gods and goddesses with lives carefully watched and ministered to by temple attendants, however, only in the Hebrew religion was there the religious notion of a single,

personal God who was moral, sovereign, and intimately related to man.

Furthermore, only in this Hebrew religion did God reveal Himself by communicating his emotions, plans, will, and desires to mankind for its own knowledge of Him, as well as for the instruction of the nation in every aspect of life.

The Jewish prophet, unlike his pagan counterpart, did not try to manipulate God, as is the case with magic and occult practices, but rather was consumed with the effect that his experienced contact with God produced in him.

Whereas the seers, priests, diviners, and magicians of other religions sought to understand and placate the gods in order to gain more mastery over their own natural and cultural environments, the Hebrew prophets continually dealt with the implications directly produced by their call into service:

- This included the transformation that the call produced in their lives (farmer to prophet, court official to prophet, etc.).
- There were also the implications brought about by the message that they preached to the people from God (for example, Jeremiah put into stocks or lowered into a dry well because the leaders didn't like the message that he brought from God).

This need to speak and tension with hearers was not present in pagan religious experiences between the people and their magicians and priests.

2. The Call was from God

Then the Lord stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me,

"Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.

- **Jeremiah 1:9**

The call did not originate from a feeling of moral indignation (That's not right!) , or national pride (They can't do that to us!), or conscientious concern (Somebody needs to do something about that!). The source of the calling was in God, not the prophet. In other words, God was the subject of the call not the object of the call. Thus, the call had significance for the prophet because of its origin in God. These men did not answer some unknown deity or even their own conscience or the call of their nation. They responded to the call of almighty God, the God of their fathers and the God of their nation and its history.

Now, there were many diviners and magicians operating in the era but the similarities between these and the prophets were minimal. The major objection of the prophets themselves when compared to these others was that their source was different.

- The source of the magician and diviner's initiative was himself or a teacher.
- The source of the Hebrew prophet's message was the living God.

Therefore, the motivating force for the pagan religious worker was his own initiative whereas the Hebrew prophet only moved or spoke when God chose to instruct him or put a message on his heart.

3. The Call was Powerful

The power of the call was contained in the fact that until the prophet's contact with God, everything that had been tradition - ritual, law, worship and feasts - now became alive, relevant, and vibrant (like the separate pieces coming together as a whole giving the individual insight and understanding at a level that not only wiped away all doubt but gave one joy, peace, courage, and the taste of the heavenly Kingdom to come).

This "experience" of God created a core crisis which the prophet tried to convey through the message(s) he preached.

Flying Fish

The 'Ray Finned' fish (a type of Cod referred to as a Flying Fish) can leap out of the water and travel up to 160 feet (50 yards) before splashing back down. These fish are like prophets in a way. They live in the ocean with all the other fish among the incredibly varied environment that provides all that they need in order to live a full fish life. However, this type of fish has the ability to propel itself out and above the water for a short time. While in the air they see a whole new and different world with the sky, sun, birds, mountains, even other living creatures sharing the space above the water where they occasionally find themselves when launched for a few brief moments.

Like these fish, a prophet has had an awakening, a life crisis, a vision that he can't unsee (he's flown above the water). This becomes an experience that changes his understanding of reality and thus he will never be the same. So, he goes to share this good news with his fellow humans and like the fish who have never flown above the water, they just don't get it! They can't see the new reality he has seen because they are just fish, they cannot fly.

The prophet's call from God gives them a vision that changes their concept of reality, and this crisis becomes the spiritual fuel that propels their ministry of prophecy despite hardship and threats of death. Their vision of the new reality keeps them faithful to their mission.

Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.

- **John 6:68**

[Jesus has asked His Apostles if they too would abandon Him like other followers who had stopped following because His teachings had become difficult to understand and relate to. Simon Peter expresses his angst as one who had no choice but to follow because he had flown "above the water" and witnessed Divinity, heard the Word made flesh. Once one had experienced this, there was no where else to be or go except to follow the One who had revealed this vision to him.]

Therefore, even though the message varied from time to time, the core was similar and directly related to the call which they originally received - the initial vision of God beyond the shadows, the power of God witnessed. The clarity and precision of the message which possessed him and the irresistible impulse to speak it, maintained the conviction that the word had come to the prophet from beyond himself.

4. The Call had a Specific Purpose

The power of the call served not only as a witness to the prophet but equipped him with power to witness to others. Even when facing hostile or indifferent audiences this did not dilute the power and conviction of the preaching or the message itself. Regardless of the audience, the attitude, or topic, the prophets

were uncompromising in their denouncing of sin and unfaithfulness.

These men did not see their calling as a sign to withdraw from society, to live a solitary life (hermit or monk), but rather as a mission to go out and engage with society in bringing people the word and will of God. And to do this whether it was well received or not.

5. The Call was not Transferable

Only God had/has the authority and power to call. Prophets have followers/helpers (i.e. Elijah – Elisha) that they taught and mentored (Paul – Timothy/Titus) but could not pass along their original calling. Men could pass on wisdom, mission, and teaching, only God provided the divine call.

Also, even though his calling was the spiritual core that motivated the prophet, it was not the focus of his ministry - which was conveying God's word and will to his people. Only the results of the call were visible and meaningful to others, the call itself was meaningful and understood only by the prophet.

6. The Call was Accompanied by Signs

The call provided a powerful and spiritual experience for the prophet but was also accompanied by supernatural activity done by him as well as experienced by him (dreams, visions, insights, etc.).

- A. Samuel - miracles of rain and thunder to validate his words to Israel - Jeremiah 12:16-17
- B. Ezekiel – Visions - Ezekiel 4:1-17; 5:1-17

C. Daniel – Visual effects, miracles, voice – Exodus 4:1-9; 21

D. Isaiah – Signs – Isaiah 7:14; Visions – Isaiah 6:1

The signs confirmed both the prophets calling as well as his ministry, also the punishment for false or unfulfilled prophecy was death.

But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.'

- Deuteronomy 18:20

7. The Call Changed the Man into the Prophet. How?

- A. It called him to believe - the prophet was the first one to believe that he was being called by God to serve. This was the basis on which he relied in calling upon others to believe his message.
- B. The call separated him - he was now separated from the world and this prepared him to mediate the message of God to the people of God with him in between.
- C. The call made him responsible - the burden of God's call and the responsibility to bring God's word to the people made them acutely aware of the effect of their conduct on the people. This in turn made them painfully aware of their own sinfulness and need for God's mercy. The calling did not confer the ability to be impervious to temptations, sin, and failure. If anything, their call forced the prophets to make a greater effort at holy living.

- D. The call produced a struggle within - the Divine nature of the call and the prophet's ability to accept or refuse the call created great anxiety. Rejecting the call would produce regret and second guessing. Accepting the call would produce doubt (can I do this, is it real?), as well as fear (what will the people think or do?). These opposing feelings created anxiety and emotional strain. Prophets became men of prayer in order to cope with these emotional and spiritual challenges.

For the most part, the people saw the prophets as called - all true prophets were considered called by God in the eyes of the people. They were aware of this by the knowledge of their call and the way this calling gave power to their messages. This was so, even if they disagreed with the prophet's message or simply chose to disregard it. A good example of this is Jeremiah. The king and the people continually rejected his message of warning and demands to repent, but no one doubted that he was a prophet called by God, they just didn't want to hear and heed his warnings from God until it was too late (Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and its temple and carried many into exile - 587 BC).

SUMMARY

The "call experience" of the Old Testament prophets initiated, supported, and confirmed their ministry to God's people.

We said that the call had certain features:

- A. It was unique (unlike anything else in other religions).
- B. It was Divine (God called, He was the source).
- C. It was powerful (it provided spiritual fuel for the journey to serve God).

- D. It was specific (it raised up men to speak for God).
- E. It was not transferable (only God called).
- F. It was accompanied by signs (a Divine call with Divine proof).
- G. It was a change agent (God's call changed a believer into a prophet, a follower into a leader).



READING ASSIGNMENT

**READ THE BOOK OF HOSEA BEFORE READING
THE NEXT CHAPTER OF THIS BOOK.**

In our review of the Minor Prophets, we will examine the following areas of each book:

1. The prophet himself.
2. The prophet's time.
3. The prophet's message.
4. Outline and commentary of the book itself.
5. Practical lessons for today.

3.

Hosea

With this chapter we begin our study of the Minor Prophets themselves. One point of review I want to maintain here, that will be helpful as we study these twelve prophets, is that the order in which they appear in the Bible is the same as the order they appear in history and more specifically around three important dates in history:

1. The fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel – 721 BC

- Hosea – Joel – Amos – Obadiah – Jonah – Micah

2. The fall of the Southern Kingdom of Judah – 587 BC

- Nahum – Habakkuk – Zephaniah

3. Return of the exiles from Babylon to Judea and Jerusalem – 588-457 BC

- Haggai – Zechariah – Malachi

I will not be including each prophet's book as I normally do with Scripture but will expect each student to read beforehand the prophet being discussed in successive chapters. In this way, each will be familiar with the material before reading the explanations in this book.

This study will review each book by breaking it down into five categories:

1. The Prophet
2. The Prophet's Time
3. The Prophet's Message
4. The Prophet's Book
5. The Prophet's Lessons

In this way, between your careful readings and the explanations in this book you will become familiar with these often neglected prophets.

HOSEA

1. The Prophet

Hosea is referred to as "O SEE" son of Berri in the Hebrew Bible. The name Hosea means to save or salvation. He was a citizen of the Northern Kingdom and had a long prophetic ministry from about 750 to 722 BC. We don't have much information about his background or occupation outside of his prophetic ministry. He does have an unusual calling in that, instead of a spoken message he was to deliver to the people, God called him to "live out" a situation in his personal life that would reflect or mirror a similar situation that was taking place at that time between God and the people of the Northern Kingdom.

This method of "acting out" various scenarios was a common practice among God's prophets and servants. For example:

- A. Moses removing shoes to indicate holy ground
– Exodus 3:5
- B. Saul cutting up two oxen and sending pieces to tribal leaders as a call to war. – I Samuel 11:17
- C. Ezekiel eating a scroll – Ezekiel 2:8-3:6
- D. God had Ezekiel shave his beard, cut his hair and divide it into three parts – Ezekiel 5:2
- E. Isaiah was told to walk barefoot and naked for three years – Isaiah 20:3-4
- F. Agabus tied Paul's belt around his own hands and feet to warn of the Apostle's arrest in Jerusalem – Acts 21:11

Hosea was called to reflect the Northern Kingdom of Israel's unfaithfulness to God (by worshipping various idols and other gods) while still calling themselves His people and offering Him worship, prayers, and sacrifices.

When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the Lord."

- Hosea 1:2

Hosea was to mirror this blatant infidelity by purposely choosing a whore to be his wife, having children with her all the while knowing that she would repeatedly cheat on him with other men.

As we read on from his initial calling and response by taking Gomer (means – to end) as his wife, we see God then using their relationship as a reflection of His own relationship with Israel (Hosea, like God and His unconditional love; and Gomer, like Israel a people who continually sinned). The interesting facet of this acted out prophecy was that God used the name of the three children that Gomer had with Hosea as messages to the people of Israel concerning their conduct, its effect, and the consequences that these would produce.

2. The Prophet's Time

Hosea lived and ministered during the period of the Divided Kingdom and as the opening verse explains, his ministry lasted through the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (kings of the Southern Kingdom, and Jeroboam II who was the king of the Northern Kingdom where he lived and prophesied). His book

doesn't mention it, but he was a contemporary of the prophets of the Southern Kingdom, Isaiah and Micah.

During Jeroboam II's reign the northern Kingdom enjoyed great economic prosperity. His armies were victorious over the Arameans, he conquered Damascus and extended Israel to its former limits. However, this economic prosperity advantaged only the rich who grew richer while, because of social injustice, the poor remained poor and could not even find relief or redress from their oppression from the courts.

Jeroboam rebuilt and fortified Shechem as the capital of the Northern Kingdom and wanting to avoid his people returning to worship at the temple in Jerusalem, which was located in the southern Kingdom (thus losing their allegiance to the South). To avoid this, he built two state temples each with golden calves located in the cities of Bethel and Dan.

Into this prosperous society with luxurious homes, a vibrant economy, expanding power and population (350,000 – Population of Palestine – Iron Age II – Broshi and Finkelstein, 1992 – Wiki) who have abandoned the worship of the God of their ancestors for the pagan gods of their neighbors - God sends prophets to denounce their materialism, injustice, and idolatry – Jonah, Amos, Joel, and the subject of this study, the prophet Hosea.

3. The Prophet's Message

Set around the fall of the northern Kingdom of Israel, Hosea's preaching denounces the worship of gods other than the God of the Jews, Yahweh.

Much of Hosea's message is framed as a living metaphor comparing Israel's abandonment of Yahweh to a woman being unfaithful to her husband. God called Hosea to live out this situation by marrying Gomer who would bear him children but would also become unfaithful to him. This is the first time in Scripture that God's relationship with His people would be referred to as a marriage.

We see that Hosea seeks out Gomer after their separation (he buys her back from a slave market – Hosea 3:2) and brings her home – this time a metaphor for the eventual reconciliation between God and his people – a sign of hope.

Another feature of Hosea's preaching is the naming of his children with names that had symbolic meaning, reflecting the relationship between God and Israel. Each time Gomer bore a boy or a girl the name of the child referred to a judgment of God on the people. This judgment grew in severity with each successive child. For example:

A. Jezreel – Means God Sows

³ So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. ⁴ And the Lord said to him, "Name him Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will punish the house of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.

- Hosea 1:3-4

Symbolically, this name is a metaphor for actions sowed that reap certain consequences. It is also the name of a valley where many battles were fought and much blood shed. It is also where

king Saul died in battle. In giving this name, God is announcing that he would bring judgment on the house of Jehu, a former king, who destroyed several royal families (Omri/Ahaziah/Ahab) to secure his position as king. The connection between Jehu and Jezreel is that it was at Jezreel that Jehu killed king Joram, Ahaziah, Jezebel, and king Ahab's descendants. (II Kings 9:24-10:17). These were wicked kings and with the preaching of Elijah, Jehu began a religious reform but eventually formed an alliance with Assyria which was seen as an act of unfaithfulness by not depending entirely on God. For this and other sins God was to bring judgment on this family and descendants and announced it with the naming of Hosea's firstborn.

B. Lo-ruhamah – Means no mercy

Then she conceived again and gave birth to a daughter.
And the Lord said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I
will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel,
that I would ever forgive them.

- Hosea 1:6

No mercy refers to God's mercy for the people in a covenant relationship with him. God was slow to anger and patient with his people. Before, with Jezreel he announces the judgment and punishment of one family.

Note that there is no judgment on the Southern Kingdom.

Now, the intensity increases in that he will no longer have the same attitude of mercy for all the people of the Northern Kingdom in the covenant with Him, not just one family.

C. Lo-Ammi – Means not my people

⁸ When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and gave birth to a son. ⁹ And the Lord said, "Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not My people and I am not your God."

- Hosea 1:8-9

Before, God punished his people in many ways but despite these times they were still His people! This time, however, we have the most severe act when God is rejecting the northern Kingdom as his covenant people.

SUMMARY – WHAT IS HOSEA ABOUT?

Hosea's book is a very emotional and passionate account of the relationship between God and the northern Kingdom of Israel. It portrays the unfaithfulness of the people of God and the consequences of their actions. Hosea's own troubled relationship with his wife served as a metaphor for God's relationship with Israel. Despite Israel's sinful ways God still pleads with them to repent and return to him because He offers forgiveness and salvation.

4. The Prophet's Book

Chapters 1-3 – the marriage of Hosea and Gomer serves as a metaphor for God's relationship with unfaithful Israel. Hosea takes Gomer back (after infidelity) just as God promises to take back Israel as His people.

Chapters 4-7 – these chapters contain a series of accusations against Israel for its idolatry, dishonesty, and social injustice. Hosea warns that these actions will bring Divine punishment.

Chapters 8-10 – the people continue to pursue false gods (Baal) and refuse to listen to God's calls to repentance. Hosea predicts that they will be punished for their sins.

Chapters 11-14 – God's love for His people shines through in these chapters. Despite Israel's sins, God cannot abandon them and He promises salvation to those who repent and turn back to Him.

SPECIAL FEATURES OF HOSEA'S BOOK

A. The use of Hosea's family situation as a living metaphor reflecting God's relationship with Israel.

When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the Lord."

- Hosea 1:2

B. Hosea uses passionate, vivid, and emotional imagery to express the gravity of Israel's sins and the depth of God's love.

¹ "Come, let us return to the Lord.

For He has torn us, but He will heal us;

He has wounded us, but He will bandage us.

² "He will revive us after two days;

He will raise us up on the third day,

That we may live before Him.

³ "So let us know, let us press on to know the Lord.

His going forth is as certain as the dawn;

And He will come to us like the rain,

Like the spring rain watering the earth."

- **Hosea 6:1-3**

C. Hosea is one of the first prophets to address the issue of social injustice and call the wealthy and powerful to account for their exploitation of the poor.

⁶ Therefore, return to your God,

Observe kindness and justice,

And wait for your God continually.

⁷ A merchant, in whose hands are false balances,

He loves to oppress.

⁸ And Ephraim said, "Surely I have become rich,

I have found wealth for myself;

In all my labors they will find in me

No iniquity, which would be sin."

- **Hosea 12:6-8**

D. Hosea's book contains some of the most memorable lines in the Old Testament.

For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

- **Hosea 6:6**

E. The book's structure is not linear or chronological but rather organized around themes and ideas which makes it more difficult to outline and follow.

For example: spiritual adultery; God's love and mercy; the consequences of sin; God's view of injustice.

God is a God of both justice and mercy. He will judge and punish unfaithfulness, wickedness, and oppression of the weak and poor. On the other hand, he will have mercy on those who return to him in faith and repentance.

LESSONS FOR TODAY

1. Remain faithful

God has and will always punish infidelity and reward those who remain faithful (not perfect). For example, I'm not the perfect husband but I am a faithful one.

2. God is love

We see God's love in the creation and in the many blessings He provides for us each day. However, the greatest example of His love is His willingness to forgive our most egregious sins. After the miracles and blessings given to the Jews by God, they abandoned Him to worship gods of wood and stone, and yet God was prepared to forgive and bless them again.

3. Our faith is demonstrated most clearly in the way we treat other people.

The people of Hosea's day thought that keeping the ritual laws of sacrifice at the temple fulfilled their duty to God in full and how they treated others had no bearing on their relationship with

God. This is why Hosea says, "I delight in loyalty (to God) rather than sacrifice. And in the knowledge of God (His laws) than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6). This is an example of parallelism, a Hebrew poetic device, where the second verse is parallel or similar to the first.

In other words, the author says the same thing twice but in different ways. Here the point is that unfaithfulness or disobedience to God's word or will cannot be covered over or replaced by more ritual. In context Hosea's message is that mistreatment of others (which goes against God's will and word) cannot be covered over by religious observances or ritual. In other words, your prayers, praise, and worship are acceptable to God so long as your treatment of other people is acceptable to Him as well. A New Testament version of this is:

By this all men will know that you are My disciples,
if you have love for one another.
- John 13:35

The surest proof of your claim to be a disciple of Jesus is the love you have for other disciples.



READING ASSIGNMENT

RE-READ: HOSEA
READ: JOEL / AMOS

4.

Joel / Amos

I want to clarify some information concerning the order, time, and object of each Minor Prophet's ministry, as well as how they are to be read. Now, there are various opinions as to when they lived and carried on their ministry with three possible periods:

- A. Before the fall of the Northern Kingdom – 721 BC
- B. Before the fall of the Southern Kingdom – 587 BC
- C. During the time of the return from exile – 450 BC

I've read several commentaries that place Joel, for example, in the time before 721 BC, while others argue for his appearance during the Jewish return from exile in the 5th century BC.

I've chosen to follow the order that the books were arranged in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament as the historical appearance of each prophet. This means that Hosea, the first book listed in the group of twelve was also a prophet who appeared before the Northern Kingdom fell in 721 BC. Using this approach, the

second prophet mentioned would also have lived and worked in and around this early date and not in the late period (450 BC) as some have suggested.

Another feature of the Minor Prophets is that in the Hebrew Bible, all twelve are included in a single book and meant to be read in that way – with each prophet being a single chapter of a book with twelve chapters – and not as twelve individual books.

Aaron Ventura writes in his overview of Joel:



Often a book will begin by picking up where the previous one left off. For example, Joel ends with, 'For the land dwells in Zion' Joel 3:21, and Amos begins with, 'The Lord roars from Zion...' Amos 1:2

- localchristendom.com/joel-overview

Our study will review the same elements in each book – the prophet, his time, message, order of his book, and main lessons. However, if we keep in mind that all of these were designed to form one overall book/message we will be able to keep an eye on the bigger picture and the main message that all twelve were bringing.

Now, in the previous chapter we studied the first of the Minor Prophets, Hosea, and the unusual way that God made him act out, in his own marriage and family life, the unfaithfulness of Israel (Northern Kingdom) in its relationship with God.

In this chapter, we continue with the next two prophets listed: Joel and Amos.

JOEL

1. The Prophet

His name is a Hebrew word which means "Yahweh is God" or "The Lord is God". He lived sometime before the key date of the fall of the Northern Kingdom (721 BC) and may have been a contemporary of Hosea, the prophet, who preceded him and prophesied concerning the Northern Kingdom of Israel. However, Joel lived in the Southern Kingdom of Judah and his message was directed at the people of the Southern Kingdom. Not much is known about his occupation, background or calling as a prophet.

2. The Prophet's Time

No information is given about a specific historical time or is any king mentioned, although it is supposed, given his position in the list of the twelve that he lived during the reign of king Joash (835-796 BC). It would make sense that Joel doesn't mention a king in his writings since at that time Joash's grandmother, Athaliah had crowned herself queen after having killed off possible heirs to the throne. However, Joash, her grandson, had survived the coup and was hidden and protected by priests and other officials until he, as a legitimate descendant of king David, was crowned king when he was seven years old. This ended the reign and life of his grandmother, Queen Athaliah, who had been the only woman to rule the Jewish people. Although Joash was formally crowned as king, because of his youth, the affairs of the Southern Kingdom were managed by the priests of the Temple and other officials of the royal court until he could take full

control. This may explain why Joel does not mention any king in his prophetic writings.

3. The Prophet's Message

Joel's book focuses its prophetic judgment on the Southern Kingdom of Judah with frequent references to Zion and temple worship.

Zion – root word "castle" or "High Point". It was the name of the Jebusite fortress captured by David (Isaiah 5:6-9) and became the city of Jerusalem which contained the seat of military power (royal throne) and spiritual power (temple). Eventually the term was used as a metaphor for a place where the Lord protects His people from the evils of the world. The physical city of Jerusalem was symbolically referred to as Zion – the City of Holiness or Zion – the City of Refuge.

Because of its status, the Jews who lived there believed that it was impenetrable by enemies. This also explains why the people of the Southern Kingdom did not heed the warnings of the prophets thinking that God would never let Jerusalem, the holy city of Zion, fall.

In the present era the term "Zion" or "Zionist" refers to the effort made to reclaim the ancient territory of biblical Israel and create a modern state in this ancient territory. This was accomplished after World War II when the allies repatriated Jewish refugees from Europe back to the original territory formerly known as Israel. The term is still used today (Zionist or Zionism) to refer to Jewish nationalism – a modern political movement that believes that the best way to protect Jewish culture and religion is to maintain a strong Jewish nation settled in the Biblical homeland of Israel.

SUMMARY OF JOEL'S PREACHING

Like many other prophets Joel's preaching revolves around three main themes:

- God's judgment due to sin and unfaithfulness.
- The need to repent.
- A promise of blessings and restoration.

CONTENT OF THE BOOK OF JOEL

1. Locust plague and famine

He begins by describing a devastating locust plague that struck the land of Judah. This has caused great destruction leading to famine and economic hardship.

2. Call to repentance

In response to this disaster, he calls on the nation to turn back to God with fasting and weeping in order to receive God's mercy and forgiveness.

3. Day of the Lord

Joel prophesies about the "Day of the Lord" which refers to God's judgment which could simultaneously refer to a present event, a near future event (70 AD destruction of Jerusalem), or the end of the world. Each of these are examples of the "Day of the Lord."

4. Promise of restoration

Along with a warning of judgment there is also a promise of both physical and spiritual blessings for those who repent.

5. Outpouring of the Spirit

There is a messianic prophecy in Joel 2:28-32.

28 "It will come about after this
That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind;
And your sons and daughters will prophesy,
Your old men will dream dreams,
Your young men will see visions.
29 "Even on the male and female servants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.
30 "I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth,
Blood, fire and columns of smoke.
31 "The sun will be turned into darkness
And the moon into blood
Before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.
32 "And it will come about that whoever calls on the
name of the Lord
Will be delivered;
For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
There will be those who escape,
As the Lord has said,
Even among the survivors whom the Lord calls.
- Joel 2:28-32

It promises that when the Messiah comes, everyone will have the Spirit of God enabling them to lead holy lives and serve God, not only occasional prophets, kings, or special servants called on at various times to serve the nation (Samuel or Samson, etc.).

This prophecy is quoted by Peter on Pentecost Sunday (Acts 2:17-21) to explain the dynamic work of the Spirit giving the Apostles the gift of speaking in different languages in order to preach to the many nations gathered in Jerusalem on that day. Peter explained that this evidence of the Spirit empowering ordinary men and later on, the Spirit given to those who were repented and baptized, were the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:37-38).

4. The Prophet's Book

1. Locust plague and call to repentance – Joel 1:1-20
2. The Day of the Lord and Divine judgment – Joel 2:1-17
3. Promises of restoration and outpouring of the Holy Spirit – Joel 2:18-32
4. Judgment on the nations and final restoration – Joel 3:1-17
5. Final deliverance and blessings for the faithful – Joel 3:18-21

LESSONS FOR TODAY

1. Try Repentance

The locust infestation and the broken economy were not only physical/natural difficulties, but they were also attention getters for people to examine their conduct. Sometimes sickness and trouble are just challenges in life we have to meet and overcome. However, there are times when what's needed is not just quiet suffering but rather a careful examination of our conscience and honest review of our conduct to see if repentance is in order. It's not unheard of in this day and age that God permits trouble and

thorns to force us to stop and review our thinking and conduct to see if some repentance is not in order.

2. The hope that Joel spoke of then is still our hope today.

Everyone can attain the pouring forth of the Spirit today by obeying the same gospel preached by Peter.

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" ³⁸ Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

- Acts 2:37-38

The Spirit in every Christian is the agent Who will raise us up to eternal life!

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

- Romans 8:11

3. God will make things right.

In chapter 3 Joel speaks of the Judgment of the nations of that era that God would accomplish – especially of those people who had mistreated God's people in one way or another (Joel 3:1-3).

This is a preview of the final judgment that God will perform at the end of the world when Jesus returns.

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. ¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.

- II Corinthians 5:10-11

So, don't be dismayed by the seeming victory of evil over good, of gross injustice, of political corruption, of all that's ungodly and unholy that you see every day in the media. God, through His prophets, promises that there will be a reckoning.

AMOS

1. The Prophet

His name comes from the Hebrew word "Amas" which signifies carrying a burden or a load. The significance of Amos' name is that it was a reflection of his real life's mission of carrying the heavy burden of responsibility of delivering a challenging and significant message from God to the people, calling them to righteousness and accountability before God.

Amos was a shepherd and farmer from Tekoa, a small town in the Southern Kingdom located about ten miles south of Jerusalem. His prophetic ministry was directed at the Northern Kingdom (even though he lived in the Southern Kingdom).

During the time of Amos' ministry (786-746 BC) there were other prophets delivering messages to different regions and communities:

- **Hosea** – Northern Kingdom
- **Isaiah** – North and South Kingdom
- **Micah** – Southern Kingdom
- **Jonah** – Assyria (Nineveh)

Amos preached during the reign of Jeroboam II's rule over the Northern Kingdom and king Uzziah's over the Southern Kingdom. Amos was not a trained teacher, nor did he come from a family or line of prophets.

He described his background and calling by God in the following verses:

The words of Amos, who was among the shepherders from Tekoa, which he envisioned in visions concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

- Amos 1:1

¹⁴ Then Amos replied to Amaziah, "I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs. ¹⁵ But the Lord took me from following the flock and the Lord said to me, 'Go prophesy to My people Israel.'

- Amos 7:14-15

2. The Prophet's Time

Amos prophesied during the rule of Jeroboam which was a time of economic prosperity and military success for the Northern Kingdom.

- Jeroboam extended the borders of the Northern Kingdom producing more agriculture, trade, and taxes.
- Israel enjoyed a period of peace which allowed for a focus on internal growth and development.
- The Northern kingdom also benefited from many trade routes across its territory which brought wealth and resources into the kingdom.

- Jeroboam had established alliances with other nations which fostered political stability.

However, not all was well since these alliances were accompanied by social injustice, moral decay, and unfaithfulness to the God of Israel Who had originally brought them out of Egyptian slavery and settled them in a prosperous land.

Amos spoke to a nation guilty of the following:

1. **Social injustice** – The rich were exploiting the poor and openly perverting justice.
2. **Idolatry and false worship** – Jeroboam maintained the worship of the golden calves in Bethel and Dan set up by his father. The people continued to mix pagan religious practices with the worship of Yahweh.
3. **Luxurious lifestyles** – The rich indulged themselves and ignored the needs of the poor.
4. **Corruption and bribery** – The legal system was compromised by bribes and perversion to benefit the rich.
5. **Military success and complacency** – The nation believed that their armies protected them without reference to God.
6. **Dishonest business practices** – False weights were used to exploit customers.
7. **Refusal to repent** – Despite the warnings of the prophets the people continued in their sinful ways refusing to turn back to God.

3. The Prophet's Message

In response to these moral, religious, and social evils, God chooses a simple shepherd and farmer from the south to prophecy against the sinful elites of the Northern Kingdom. Amos denounces social injustices, economic exploitation, religious idolatry, false worship, and the people's refusal to turn back to God. Despite warnings of a judgment to come, Amos presents a message of the hope of a renewed relationship with God and blessings for those who sincerely turn back to Him.

Note again the three main themes:

1. God's judgment due to sin
2. The need to repent
3. A promise of restoration and blessings

4. The Prophet's Book

A. Outline

The Book of Amos, one of the Twelve Minor Prophets in the Bible, can be outlined as follows:

1. Introduction (Amos 1:1-2)

- Identifies Amos as a shepherd from Tekoa.
- Establishes the historical context during the reigns of Uzziah in Judah and
- Jeroboam II in Israel.

2. Oracles Against the Nations (Amos 1:3-2:16)

- Pronounces judgments against neighboring nations, including Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab.
- Highlights God's judgment on these nations for their sins.

3. Oracles Against Israel (Amos 3:1-6:14)

- Emphasizes Israel's special relationship with God and the responsibility that comes with it.
- Condemns social injustice, oppression of the poor, and corruption.
- Warns of impending judgment and calls for repentance.

4. Visions of Judgment (Amos 7:1-9:10)

- Amos receives a series of visions symbolizing God's judgment, including locusts, fire, a plumb line, and a basket of ripe fruit.
- Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, opposes Amos and rejects his message.
- Amos prophesies the downfall of the religious sanctuaries and the exile of the people.

5. Future Restoration (Amos 9:11-15)

- Concludes with a message of hope and restoration.

- Promises the rebuilding of the fallen tent of David and the agricultural abundance of the land.
- Expresses God's faithfulness to His covenant.

B. Special Features

The Book of Amos in the Bible exhibits several distinctive features that set it apart within the prophetic literature:

1. Social Justice Emphasis

Amos is known for his strong emphasis on social justice. The famous phrase "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24) encapsulates this theme.

2. Universal Accountability

Unlike some prophets who focus primarily on the chosen people of Israel or Judah, Amos extends his message of judgment to surrounding nations. He proclaims God's universal sovereignty and holds all nations accountable for their actions.

3. Confrontation with Religious Institutions

Amos confronts the religious institutions of his time, particularly the sanctuaries in Bethel and Gilgal. He criticizes the people for engaging in empty religious rituals while neglecting justice and righteousness.

4. Amos' Background

Amos introduces himself as a shepherd from Tekoa, emphasizing his humble background. This distinguishes him from the

professional prophets and priests of his time and underscores the idea that God can call individuals from any background to deliver His messages.

5. Dialogue with Amaziah

The book includes a unique dialogue between Amos and Amaziah, the priest of Bethel. Amaziah opposes Amos and informs the king about his prophecies. This interaction highlights the tension between the prophetic message and the religious establishment.

LESSONS FOR TODAY

1. Commitment to Social Justice is not only for the Politically Minded

Amos's messages highlight the importance of social justice in the eyes of God. Today, the call for justice and compassion remains relevant. As individuals and societies, we can learn from Amos to actively address issues of inequality, poverty, and exploitation.

Our goal as the church is not political but spiritual. We want to reveal Christ by serving our society as Christ served His. We have no miraculous power to feed 5000 with a few loaves of bread and fish but we can feed those in need, visit the sick, comfort those who are in sorrow, stand up for what is right even to our hurt.

2. Authentic Worship is Confirmed by Actual Righteousness

Amos condemned empty religious rituals divorced from genuine righteousness and ethical living. In the contemporary context, the lesson is clear: authentic worship extends beyond rituals to

encompass how we treat others and live out our faith. An actual approach to righteousness involves ethical conduct, compassion, and a genuine concern for the wellbeing of others. This challenges us to align our beliefs with our actions and to live out our faith in practical, loving ways that prove in deeds our search for a maturing righteousness.

3. We are Responsible for the Vulnerable (Matthew 25:31-46)

Amos directed his attention to the plight of the poor and vulnerable, challenging individuals and societies to take responsibility for those who are marginalized or oppressed. Today, we tend to leave this work to secular charitable organization who do good but give no glory to God.

The benevolence ministry of the church should be as dynamic as the Evangelism or Worship ministry because it is in this area of ministry that we put to the test the sincerity of our worship rituals and the truth of our gospel message.

If God gave His Son so that we might be saved, we should be able to give up much of our resources to lessen the pain of those who are suffering in this world. In this God is glorified. We also need to remember that God can and does use anyone in any way glorify Himself.



READING ASSIGNMENT

RE-READ: JOEL / AMOS

READ: OBADIAH / MICAH

5.

Obadiah / Micah

In this chapter we will examine the lives and prophecies of Obadiah, the fourth in the series of the Minor Prophets, and Micah, the sixth prophet on the list given in the Hebrew Bible. I've chosen to study them this way because the fifth Minor Prophet mentioned is Jonah and his life and work was very different than Obadiah and Micah. Although all three lived at the same time, Obadiah and Micah's books contain a prophetic message to or about God's people. Even though Jonah was considered a prophet his warnings were not directed at the Northern or Southern Kingdoms, but rather to the capitol city of the Assyrian Empire, Nineveh. Therefore, we will study the fourth and sixth Minor Prophets now and devote the following chapter to Jonah's ministry.

OBADIAH

1. The Prophet

The name Obadiah means "servant of Yahweh" or "worshipper of Yahweh." There were several other Obadiah's mentioned in the Old Testament.

- A. Obadiah the steward of King Ahab who ruled the Northern Kingdom with his wicked wife Queen Jezebel. This Obadiah was the steward of the king's house and was a devout man who hid and protected hundreds of prophets from Jezebel's persecution (I Kings 18:17-46).
- B. There was also an Obadiah who is listed in the genealogies of I Chronicles 3:21 as a descendant of Joab, the military leader who served King David.

There is not much information about the background of the prophet Obadiah other than the fact that he is grouped with prophets who lived in the 8th century BC, and that his prophecies target the nation of Edom and their mistreatment of the Southern Kingdom, so it is assumed that he lived in or around Jerusalem. We don't have any information about Obadiah's family, trade, or calling by God into ministry.

2. The Prophet's Time

Again, other than his placement along with other prophets who lived before the fall of the Northern Kingdom (721 BC) Obadiah's book does not mention events taking place at the time he lived. Some scholars put his time after the destruction of the Southern Kingdom in 587 BC.

3. The Prophet's Message

Obadiah's prophecies are a judgment of God on the people of Edom for their arrogance, violence, and lack of compassion toward their brother nation of Judah (Southern Kingdom) when they were attacked and destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC, some 200 years into the future! Obadiah pronounces Divine Judgment on Edom because, instead of defending or helping their ancient fraternal nation of Judah while besieged by the Babylonian army, Edom oppressed, mistreated, and took advantage of their dire situation.

A. The Edomites stood by when Jerusalem was attacked, even participated in the looting of the city.

"On the day that you stood aloof,
On the day that strangers carried off his wealth,
And foreigners entered his gate
And cast lots for Jerusalem—
You too were as one of them.
- Obadiah 1:11

B. Jeremiah suggests that Edom gloated and felt satisfaction at the Southern Kingdom's demise.

²¹ Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom,
Who dwells in the land of Uz;
But the cup will come around to you as well,
You will become drunk and make yourself naked.
²² The punishment of your iniquity has been
completed,
O daughter of Zion;
He will exile you no longer.

But He will punish your iniquity,
O daughter of Edom;
He will expose your sins!
- **Lamentations 4:21-22**

C. Edomites are accused of harboring hostility toward Judah, even during their time of calamity.

As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel because it was desolate, so I will do to you. You will be a desolation, O Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it. Then they will know that I am the Lord."
- **Ezekiel 35:15**

Obadiah's message, therefore, is that God will not forget or excuse Edom's cruel attitude and actions of exacerbating Judah's suffering in a time of crisis – their own judgment and suffering will come. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother who settled in the region Southeast of the Dead Sea known as Edom in Mt. Seir. They had a sense of security about the natural protection that their territory afforded them:

- The rugged mountain terrain offered a natural defense against invaders.
- They built dwellings in the cliffs and caves that dotted their territory. These made it difficult to attack and capture.
- They had little fertile agricultural land which did not offer much incentive for invaders to conquer.

However, over time, Obadiah's prophecies of their judgment and elimination were realized.

A. During the Hellenistic period (after Alexander the Great – 323-31 BC) an Arab group called the Nabateans expanded into Edomite territory and built the prominent city of Petra (modern day Jordan).

B. The Roman Empire annexed the Nabatean Kingdom (including former Edomite territory) in 106 AD and the region became a province of Arabia.

C. Arab conquest – with the rise of Islam in the 7th century AD the Edomite region became a part of the Islamic caliphate.

- **Caliphate** = successor or next in line.
- **Islamic caliphate** = political and religious state comprising the Muslim community and lands under their control after the death of Muhammad – 602 AD.

The distinct identity of the Edomites was eventually absorbed into the Arab population. In this way Obadiah's prophecies about Edom's eventual destruction were fulfilled in time.

4. The Prophet's Book

The Book of Obadiah in the Old Testament is the shortest book in the Hebrew Bible, consisting of only one chapter with 21 verses. Here is a brief outline of the book:

I. Introduction (Obadiah 1:1-4)

- Salutation and identification of the prophet.

¹ The vision of Obadiah.

Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom—

We have heard a report from the Lord,
And an envoy has been sent among the nations saying,
"Arise and let us go against her for battle"—
² "Behold, I will make you small among the nations;
You are greatly despised.
³ "The arrogance of your heart has deceived you,
You who live in the clefts of the rock,
In the loftiness of your dwelling place,
Who say in your heart,
'Who will bring me down to earth?'
⁴ "Though you build high like the eagle,
Though you set your nest among the stars,
From there I will bring you down,"
declares the Lord.
- **Obadiah 1:1-4**

II. Judgment Against Edom (Obadiah 1:5-14)

- Pronouncement of God's judgment against Edom for their pride, arrogance, and violence.
- Descriptions of the coming destruction and the futility of Edom's perceived strength.

III. Reasons for Edom's Judgment (Obadiah 1:15-16)

- Explanation of the reasons behind Edom's judgment, emphasizing their actions against their brother nation, Israel.

IV. Day of the Lord (Obadiah 1:17-21)

- The announcement of the "Day of the Lord" when God will judge all nations.

- The promise of restoration for Israel and the establishment of God's kingdom.
- The final victory of the house of Jacob.

V. Conclusion (Obadiah 1:21)

- The kingdom belongs to the Lord.

The Book of Obadiah primarily focuses on the judgment of Edom for its mistreatment of Israel. It emphasizes the consequences of pride, violence, and lack of compassion. The prophecy concludes with a message of hope for the restoration of Israel and the establishment of God's kingdom. The themes of Divine judgment and ultimate restoration are common elements found in many prophetic books in the Old Testament.

LESSONS FOR TODAY

1. Don't rejoice over your enemy's failure.

Do not rejoice when your enemy falls,
And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;
- **Proverbs 24:17**

Why not rejoice?

1. We are all sinners – the judgment could be on you.
2. We are supposed to love and pray for our enemies, not laugh at their judgment.
3. We can be thankful that justice is meted out, but gloating is fleshly, full of pride and not Christ-like.

2. We have a responsibility to help others.

Edom was judged and punished primarily for the fact that they refused to help their brethren when it was needed and when they had the chance. The fact that they used Judah's hardship to take advantage only made it worse. There are any number of causes that randomly solicit our help every day, however there are times when our family, our church, or our neighbors need help – the credibility of our faith is tested, and we are judged in moments like these.

3. Take advantage of every opportunity to make peace.

The historical enmity between Israel and Edom led to both their downfalls.

- Israel did not get help from Edom and fell to the Babylonians.
- Edom was absorbed into the Arab nation because God did not preserve them (judgment).

Take advantage of opportunities to convert enemies into friends because you never have too many friends.

MICAH

1. The Prophet

The word of the Lord which came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

- Micah 1:1

The name Micah, means "Who is like Yahweh?" (Chapter 1:1). He is identified as Micah of Moresheth, a town in south-western Judah, which distinguishes him from another prophet called Micah in I Kings 22. Micah prophesied in the years between 735-700 BC, which means he was witness to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria (721 BC).

Again, in verse 1 he mentions the kings who reigned during his lifetime – Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah who were all rulers of the Southern Kingdom. He was a contemporary of Hosea who preached in the Northern Kingdom, as well as Isaiah who preached in the Southern Kingdom.

Verse 1 also describes that his calling by God occurred during the reign of the kings of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, and that he would address both Samaria in the north as well as Jerusalem in the south with his messages from God. Other than the time and place of his ministry, Micah's book contains no other personal information about the prophet, his family, or the other details of his life.

2. The Prophet's Time

Micah preached to both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms during a time of political and military upheaval, as well as social corruption, idolatry, and unfaithfulness. For example:

A. Northern Kingdom

Samaria was under the threat of invasion by Assyria which finally took place in 721 BC. There were political upheavals, assassinations, and instability among the people. There was also widespread idolatry, social injustice, and broad immorality as the nation drifted away from God's commands, not only for proper worship, but also moral conduct in business and personal relationships (lying, adultery, theft, etc.).

B. Southern Kingdom

Judah also faced the threat from Assyria, however, they were spared from defeat by God during the reign of Hezekiah (an angel decimated Sennacherib's army – 185,000 soldiers were killed in one night – II Kings 19:35; Isaiah 37:36). However, the Southern Kingdom continued mixing pagan worship with the worship of Jehovah (syncretism). There was economic exploitation of the poor as leaders failed to uphold justice, causing corruption.

Micah was sent to both kingdoms:

- **North** – warned about the leaders' disobedience to God and its consequences. He also denounced corruption, as well as the need for repentance.
- **South** – preached about the importance of justice, mercy, and humility. He also called for repentance, and warned of the impending judgment of God.

3. The Prophet's Message

MESSAGES TO THE NORTHERN KINGDOM (ISRAEL)

1. Denunciation of Social Injustice

Micah condemned the Northern Kingdom for its social injustices, including oppression of the poor, bribery, and corruption. Leaders and elites were criticized for exploiting the vulnerable (Micah 2:1-2, Micah 3:1-3).

2. Warning of Divine Judgment

Micah prophesied about the impending judgment of God on Israel due to their disobedience. The Assyrian threat was looming, and Micah warned that it was a consequence of the people's unfaithfulness (Micah 5:5-6).

3. Call for Repentance

Despite the message of judgment, Micah called the people to repentance. He urged them to turn away from their sinful practices, return to God, and seek justice and righteousness (Micah 6:6-8).

MESSAGES TO THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM (JUDAH)

1. Warning Against Injustice in Judah

Micah addressed similar issues of social injustice and corruption in Judah. He criticized leaders, judges, and prophets for their role in perpetuating unethical behavior (Micah 3:9-11, Micah 7:3-7).

2. Assurance of Divine Judgment

Just as in the Northern Kingdom, Micah warned Judah about the consequences of their actions. The impending Babylonian exile was foretold as a Divine judgment for their disobedience (Micah 4:10, Micah 7:11-13).

3. Hope for Restoration

Amidst the messages of judgment, Micah also conveyed messages of hope and restoration. He prophesied about the future regathering of a remnant and the establishment of God's peaceful and righteous kingdom (Micah 4:1-4, Micah 52-4).

4. Call for Repentance

Similar to his message to Israel, Micah called for repentance in Judah. He urged the people to turn away from idolatry, false prophets, dishonest practices, and to embrace justice and mercy (Micah 6:9-16).

UNIVERSAL THEMES

1. Universal Message of Justice:

Micah's message transcended national boundaries. He spoke universally about the importance of justice, mercy, and humility before God, emphasizing that these principles applied to all nations (Micah 4:1-4, Micah 6:8).

2. Hope for the Future:

Micah's prophecies included glimpses of a hopeful future, envisioning a time when God's kingdom would be established,

and justice and righteousness would prevail (Micah 4:6-7, Micah 5:7-15).

Note that Micah doesn't organize his material with all prophecies concerning the north in one chapter and material about the Southern Kingdom in another chapter but speaks on topics referring to North and South in different parts of his book.

There are two well-known passages found in the book of Micah:

He has told you, O man, what is good;
And what does the Lord require of you
But to do justice, to love kindness,
And to walk humbly with your God?

- Micah 6:8

Jesus refers to it while admonishing the Pharisees for their spiritual blindness and legalism (Matthew 23:23).

"But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity."

- Micah 5:2

The famous prophecy concerning the Messiah's birthplace – quoted by priests to king Herod when he inquired about the Messiah's place of birth (Matthew 2:1-6).

4. The Prophet's Book

Here is a brief outline of Micah's book into seven sections:

1. Introduction (Micah 1:1-4)

- Identifies Micah as the prophet and sets the context for his prophecies.
- Describes the coming judgment on both the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah).

2. Judgment Against Israel (Micah 1:5-16)

- Pronounces judgment on Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom, and the surrounding regions.
- Uses wordplays and puns to emphasize the destruction that will come upon Israel.

3. Woes Against the Corrupt Leaders (Micah 2:1-13)

- Condemns the leaders and wealthy elite for their social injustices, oppression of the poor, and dishonest practices.
- Pronounces "woes" against those who plan evil and covet fields and homes.

4. The Future Kingdom (Micah 3:1-4:13)

- Denounces corrupt leaders, false prophets, and corrupt judges.
- Promises a future restoration and the establishment of God's kingdom where justice and peace will prevail.

5. Birthplace of the Messiah (Micah 5:1-6)

- Foretells the birthplace of the Messiah in Bethlehem.
- Describes the ruler who will come from Bethlehem and bring peace to the people.

6. God's Case Against Israel (Micah 6:1-16)

- Presents a courtroom-like setting where God brings a case against His people.
- Emphasizes the importance of justice, mercy, and humility, rather than ritual sacrifices.

7. Hope Amidst Judgment (Micah 7:1-20)

- Micah laments the moral and social decay in society.
- Expresses hope in God's mercy and the eventual restoration of His people.
- Ends with a prayer for God's intervention and salvation.

The Book of Micah is a mix of judgment and hope, addressing both the sins of the people and the promise of future redemption. It highlights the importance of justice, mercy, and humility in the context of a covenant relationship with God.

LESSONS FOR TODAY

1. True Believers Practice True Worship.

Micah challenged the idea that ritualistic practices alone fulfill God's requirements. Instead, he emphasized the importance of a genuine and humble relationship with God. Believers were encouraged to prioritize a sincere heart for God, seeking Him in

humility, repentance, and obedience, rather than relying solely on external religious observances. True worship has both components.

2. Our Worship Practices are Witnessed by our Commitment to Justice and Mercy.

Micah emphasizes the importance of justice, mercy, and ethical conduct. Believers today are reminded of their responsibility to act justly, show mercy, and uphold righteousness in their interactions with others. In this way, our spiritual exercises like prayer, praise and communion are made acceptable to God and seen as legitimate by non-believers. Even if some don't believe, they can't deny the sincerity of our belief.

3. As Believers We Have a True Hope for Salvation.

Despite the messages of judgment and the consequences of disobedience, Micah also presented a message of hope and future restoration. Believers today can draw encouragement from the assurance that God is a God of redemption. No matter how dire the circumstances, there is hope for renewal, forgiveness, and a future for those who continually return to Him for forgiveness and restoration. Micah's book encourages believers to persevere in faith, trusting that God's ultimate plan is to save us and keep us with Him forever in heaven. That's what He wants, and what He will accomplish for us. We should trust that He will succeed.



READING ASSIGNMENT

RE-READ: OBADIAH / MICAH

READ: JONAH

6.

Jonah

I believe one of the most used stories and books used for Vacation Bible School is the book of Jonah. Probably because the idea of someone being swallowed by a great fish and living in the belly of that fish for three days captures the imagination of young people at every age. Jonah, of course, was a real person not just some Old Testament parable. He was a historical figure. Jonah 1:1 says that he was the son of Amittai and this same Jonah, son of Amittai, is mentioned in II Kings 14:23-27. II Kings tells us that he was a prophet in the northern kingdom of Jeroboam II who lived in the Eighth Century before Christ.

But it is the book of Jonah that describes an important event in his life which revealed both a great gift and several weaknesses in this prophet's life (the good and bad). Let's open our Bibles and study both facets of this man's life to see if we can learn something about ourselves through him.

Jonah's Gift — Chapter 1

¹ The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, ² "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me." ³ But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from

the presence of the Lord. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

⁴ The Lord hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up. ⁵ Then the sailors became afraid and every man cried to his god, and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down and fallen sound asleep. ⁶ So the captain approached him and said, "How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god. Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish."

⁷ Each man said to his mate, "Come, let us cast lots so we may learn on whose account this calamity has struck us." So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ Then they said to him, "Tell us, now! On whose account has this calamity struck us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" ⁹ He said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land."

¹⁰ Then the men became extremely frightened and they said to him, "How could you do this?" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.

- Jonah 1:1-10

Note that the story explains itself, but within the story we discover a man who had a great gift, the gift of prophecy. Now

the gift of prophecy expressed itself in several ways and the book of Jonah demonstrates that Jonah possessed the gift in all of its forms.

For example, there is prophecy in the form of:

1. Powerful Preaching

Vs. 2 – We are told that God sends him to use his gift, his ability, at a certain place and for a specific purpose. The gift is assumed, he knows he has it, he merely receives instruction on where to use it.

Vs. 10 – Jonah refuses to do God's will, but despite this, we get a glimpse of his ability as he shares his faith with the men on board the ship. There were pagans ready to worship anything, do anything to get out of trouble, but the Word says that they actually believed Jonah simply through hearing him speak to them. Not only did they believe him, they were ready to follow his instructions.

His ability was evident, even when it wasn't used in context. Even when Jonah disobeyed God, he couldn't hide the fact that he was a powerful preacher.

2. Precise Prediction

Another facet of the gift of prophecy in these times was the ability to accurately predict the future. Today anybody with a website can set themselves up as a psychic; people applaud if a modern-day prophet is right two out of three times; but in the Old Testament times, the true gift of prophecy was confirmed if all predictions were 100% complete. Any margin of error resulted in death.

¹¹ So they said to him, "What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?"—for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy. ¹² He said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you." ¹³ However, the men rowed desperately to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming even stormier against them. ¹⁴ Then they called on the Lord and said, "We earnestly pray, O Lord, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; for You, O Lord, have done as You have pleased."

¹⁵ So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. ¹⁶ Then the men feared the Lord greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

- Jonah 1:11-16

We see that despite the terrible circumstances and consequences to Jonah, his prediction about the solution to the problem was accurate. The writer describes the attitude and actions of the survivors on the ship. In their worship and charge, the confirmation of this gift is recognized:

- They see the sign
- They worship the God that had been preached to them
- They offer true repentance as a sign of their sincere faith.

Even in disobedience, the word of the Lord does not return void.

3. Poetic Prayer — Chapter 2

¹⁷ Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

¹ Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish, ² and he said,
"I called out of my distress to the Lord,
And He answered me.

I cried for help from the depth of Sheol;
You heard my voice.

³ "For You had cast me into the deep,
Into the heart of the seas,
And the current engulfed me.

All Your breakers and billows passed over me.

⁴ "So I said, 'I have been expelled from Your sight.
Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.'

⁵ "Water encompassed me to the point of death.
The great deep engulfed me,
Weeds were wrapped around my head.

⁶ "I descended to the roots of the mountains.
The earth with its bars was around me forever,
But You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.

⁷ "While I was fainting away, I remembered the Lord,
And my prayer came to You,
Into Your holy temple.

⁸ "Those who regard vain idols
Forsake their faithfulness,

⁹ But I will sacrifice to You
With the voice of thanksgiving.

That which I have vowed I will pay.
Salvation is from the Lord."

¹⁰ Then the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited
Jonah up onto the dry land.

- Jonah 1:17-2:10

Jonah expresses his plight and its solution. He is in an impossible situation buried alive (in the depths of Sheol). His only recourse is to cry out to God because in his present physical condition, God is truly the only one who could hear him. He looks at his surroundings and compares them to the times he worshipped the Lord in Jerusalem at the temple and how sweet that was. He has no offering of animals or money to make now, but he realizes that he can offer other things that are more precious (even though he's in the belly of a fish):

- He can offer praise.
- He can offer thanksgiving.
- He can offer his faith that God can save him.
- He can offer repentance and a promise of obedience.

From inside the belly of the fish, he realizes not only that God will hear him, but also that what God wants from man is always inside of man and doesn't require a fancy building or ceremony to give. Once he realizes this, once he responds to this, he is released from the fish a changed man, ready to use his gift.

Now the amazing thing here is not only that Jonah learned these things, but that he expressed them so eloquently in these few verses. One aspect of prophecy is the ability to express in beautiful language the mind and will of God. One will not find

more beautiful poetry and powerful images in the Bible than are contained in Jonah's prayer.

And so, in the first two chapters, we are introduced to a man who possesses the gift of prophecy in all of its many expressions:

- Powerful preaching
- Precise prediction
- Poetic prayer

Jonah and Nineveh — Chapter 3

In chapter three we see how this gift was used in context and how effective Jonah was in his role as prophet.

¹ Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, ² "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." ³ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk. ⁴ Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

⁵ Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. ⁶ When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. ⁷ He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do

not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. ⁸ But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands.

⁹ Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish."

¹⁰ When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

- Jonah 3:1-10

Again, the chapter is self-explanatory. Jonah goes to Nineveh and warns them to repent or else they will be destroyed. The writer describes the complete change of heart from the king on down. As a result of Jonah's preaching and their response to it, God spares the city.

The story would have ended here and we would have a marvelous story with a good lesson about repentance and God's love, all neat and clean. But there's another chapter that goes on to describe Jonah's faults.

Jonah's Faults — Chapter 4

¹ But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry.

² He prayed to the Lord and said, "Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness,

and one who relents concerning calamity. ³ Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life." ⁴ The Lord said, "Do you have good reason to be angry?"

⁵ Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city. ⁶ So the Lord God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant. ⁷ But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered. ⁸ When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, "Death is better to me than life."

⁹ Then God said to Jonah, "Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "I have good reason to be angry, even to death." ¹⁰ Then the Lord said, "You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight.

¹¹ Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?"

- Jonah 4:1-11

At first, Jonah runs away from God and we could conclude that he was just afraid and after the fish experience he gained courage, but this would be inaccurate. Jonah was not afraid, we know this for several reasons:

- He didn't deny his faith in front of pagans who were hostile to him.
- He offered himself to be thrown overboard.
- He didn't panic when swallowed by the fish.
- He went to Nineveh and preached against it after all, a traditional enemy of the Jews.

No, his faults are made evident after he has finished preaching.

1. He was Prejudice – vs. 1-2

Some think that anger or impulsiveness were the problems, but the anger was the result of the true problem, prejudice. He was upset because God spared Jonah's non-Jewish enemies. These Assyrians, these pagans, were a thorn in the side of the Jewish nation. Here was a chance to wipe them out and God saves them.

He explains that he ran away because he knew God would forgive them if they repented and he did not want to be the one who offered them the chance. As far as he was concerned, they could and should die in their sins. He was prejudice and even God's acceptance of these people wouldn't force Jonah to accept them.

2. He was Presumptuous – v. 3-4

He assumed that he knew better than God. Now that they were spared, there would be no chance of defeating them. They might have to actually deal with them as brothers. Of course, history shows that they eventually lost the war with the North and Nineveh was destroyed as their repentance and safety died away. Jonah wanted to dictate to God what God should do with his life and the life of this nation.

3. He was Pig-Headed — vs. 5-11

He refused to acknowledge that God was the God of all. He didn't see that the same God who offered him refuge with the plant, also offered salvation to the entire city. He refused to believe his own preaching that God spared those who repented and called on Him for forgiveness. He accepted that for himself, but wouldn't extend it to his enemies. In the end, his faults cancelled out his gifts rendering him unable to share in the rewards of his preaching. I think that's why the story ends abruptly with no closure because this reflects where Jonah was in his spirit – **no closure!**

Jonah was a real person, this is not some kind of Old Testament parable, this is history. As mentioned earlier, chapter 1:1 says that he was the son of Amittai as mentioned in II Kings 14:23-27. Jonah was the prophet who served during the reign of Jeroboam II in the eighth century before Christ. Not all of his prophecies are recorded, but one of his major predictions was that the northern kingdom would have peace from its enemies to the North (this was fulfilled later in the reign of Jeroboam II). This may be why he was reluctant to go to Nineveh in the first place. He wanted them destroyed (one way of fulfilling his prophecy).

LESSONS FOR THE JEWS

Of course, when the Jews, who knew Jonah, who knew his life and prophecies had read this book, it contained several lessons for them:

1. God is the God of all men.

The Jews tended to be rather exclusive with God thinking He was only concerned with them and their well-being. This story showed them that God is the Lord of all, not just one people.

2. They had a responsibility as the light of the world.

In Romans 1:18-23, Paul says that the knowledge of God has always been evident to man:

- Through the creation
- Through the conscience of Man

In Jonah, we see that God makes Himself known through the witness of His people. In every age, people have had access to God through His special people:

- The patriarchs before Moses' time
- The Jewish Nation before Christ
(They revealed God to the people around them.)
- The church of Christ after the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus (through the preaching of the Gospel).

The book of Jonah defined the extent of their responsibility to reveal God beyond the borders of the Jewish nation.

3. God's Nature is Love

The Jews tended to see God as the God of Mt. Sinai

- The God of terrible presence and power
- The God of law
- The God of justice
- The God of punishment
- The God of holiness

Jonah's book reveals an equally important and over-arching quality of God's character. He is the God of love and compassion.

They knew that God loved them but the fact that He could also love their enemies, love those that disobeyed and hated Him, opened up a new horizon of possibility that would affect their lives and relationship with God and each other.

LESSONS FOR TODAY

Certainly, the story of Jonah and the whale or great fish has been a favorite Bible school lesson for generations. Aside from a very powerful story, it contains so many good lessons for us today, too many to mention here, but I chose three based on our study.

1. Jonah was much like we are, a combination of gifts and faults

Religions have traditionally gone from one extreme to the other in this area:

A. We're all bad

Calvin believed that man was totally depraved and unable to make a moral decision without the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit. From this teaching came all kinds of perverted ideas and social practices that hurt us. The doctrines of predestination

and irresistible grace which became the mainstay of so many Protestant and Evangelical denominations began with this misconception.

B. We're all okay

This is what we're living through today. Nothing is bad, everything is relative, you are politically incorrect if you judge anything as bad.

To these extremes, the book of Jonah clearly exposes the truth about mankind:

- Because we are made in the image of God, we can do some pretty good things, even some Godly things that are spiritual in nature.
- Because we are sinners, we also have the potential for evil in our lives, sometimes terrible evil.

Jonah teaches us that everyone has a combination of good and evil within them. It's not 50/50, sometimes more good than evil or vice versa, but always there is both (we shouldn't be surprised).

2. God's word is powerful

Despite Jonah's pig-headedness, his prejudice, his pride, when he preached God's word, it was productive:

- The pagan sailors believed, and they and their ship were saved.
- The pagan Ninevites heard Jonah's preaching, believed and repented, and they and their city were spared.

- Even Jonah himself when he spoke to God believing in his power, was saved from his predicament.

The power of God's word for condemnation or salvation reminds me of a story about a young girl and an atheist:

A little girl who was in Bible school was talking to her uncle who was an avowed atheist. He asked her, "Do you really believe that Jonah was in the belly of a fish for three days?" She answered, "Oh, yes I do, because the Bible says so." Then he said, "What do you think he ate while he was in there?" She thought for a minute and replied, "I don't know. I'll ask him when I get to heaven." And he, thinking he had her, said, "What if he doesn't go to heaven?" She smiled and replied, "Then you'll have to ask him!"

God's word is powerful to save, to build, to transform, to correct as well as to judge, to condemn and punish forever. This is why those of you who choose to make church attendance and Bible class a priority over the many pressures and activities of the world are wise, because you are filling up on the kind of power you need to deal with this world effectively and eventually move into the next world.

3. God is a God of love and forgiveness

The shining truth of Jonah that spans for centuries is that God is not only the same God, but that He is a loving and merciful God.

A. He was merciful to the sailors. They were pagans, they worshipped idols and were involved in terrible practices. They were not searching for God, God went and searched for them and found them through Jonah.

B. He was merciful to Jonah. His sins were greater because he knew God, but he disobeyed anyway. Despite this, God, in His love pursued Jonah:

- When Jonah was in the belly of the fish God went there to hear his prayer, to witness his repentance, to draw him out of his grave.
- When Jonah was angry in Nineveh, God blessed him anyway and was patient with him in his anger.

God was merciful to the Ninevites. They were not only pagans, but they had attacked and killed God's people. Yet God still felt compassion for them and reached out to them. And when they repented, He saved them and their city.

Of all of the lessons of Jonah, the one that is repeated over and over again is that God is a loving and merciful God and He will forgive and save those who come to Him in faith and repentance. As John says in I John 1:9:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

None of us will probably be in the belly of a fish, but sometimes:

- We're in a pit of depression.
- We're in a battle with sin.
- We're overwhelmed by doubt or fear, or guilt or discouragement

During these times, let's remember the God of love and mercy who can come to us no matter where we are and save us and forgive us as we believe and trust in His word.

Are you in the belly of a fish as far as your life, or marriage, or health, or finances are concerned? Call on God in prayer and faith and He will answer you.



READING ASSIGNMENT

RE-READ: JONAH

READ: NAHUM / HABAKKUK

7.

Nahum / Habakkuk

We now move to study the prophets who lived and prophesied before the fall of the Southern Kingdom in 587 BC.

NAHUM

1. The Prophet

The name Nahum means "consolation" or "comfort. The message he proclaimed was one of consolation to the oppressed people of Judah in that it spoke of God's vengeance upon the enemies of his people.

Nahum was from the city of Elkosh, whose location is unknown to us. We know nothing of his parents, occupation, or life history.

We are able to give the ministry of Nahum an approximate date from the information found in two events referred to in his book. We know that the city of Thebes (or No-amon) had already fallen when he prophesied (3:8), and the fall of Nineveh was yet to come (2:13; 3:5, 7, 15). Since the former occurred in 661 BC and the latter in 612 BC, his ministry must be dated between these

two events. However, most scholars narrow the date to the period between 630-612 BC. He was a contemporary of Zephaniah, Habakkuk and Jeremiah.

2. The Prophet's Time

Approximately 150 years before Nahum's pronouncement of doom on Nineveh, Jonah had been sent to the same city. Jonah's preaching brought about its repentance at a time of despair in her history. But in Nahum's day, Nineveh was at the height of her power and glory as Assyria's capital city. It was wealthy, haughty and impenitent. It's as if Nahum's book is the sequel to Jonah's book.

When Nahum prophesied, Nineveh's day of grace was past. Repentance is not mentioned and no prospect of deliverance from God's wrath is foreseen.

The overthrow of Nineveh was accomplished at the hands of the Medes and Chaldeans, who formed a coalition against the mutual enemy. Nahum's accurate prediction of Nineveh's fall took place in 612 BC adds credibility to God's work through the prophets who spoke His word. This was a fulfillment completed on the world stage of history and couldn't easily be diminished.

3. The Prophet's Message

A. Whereas the book of Jonah demonstrates the mercy of God, Nahum demonstrates his vengeance upon the impenitent.

^{2b} The Lord takes vengeance on His adversaries,
And He reserves wrath for His enemies.

³ The Lord is slow to anger and great in power,

And the Lord will by no means leave the guilty
unpunished.

In whirlwind and storm is His way,

- **Nahum 1:2b-3**

As one reads this book, he must bear in mind that he is not reading of Nahum's personal hatred for and joy in the overthrow of Nineveh. The outrage of Nahum is righteous indignation against a wicked and impenitent people.

B. Some critical scholars say this book is untrustworthy because it presents God as vengeful. However, a closer look at great leaders shows that they possess one or more of the following characteristics.

1. The capacity for a great love
2. The capacity for a great enthusiasm and
3. The capacity for a great indignation.



The point for the prophet Nahum is that he symbolizes the last of these, and it is Nahum who is so often missed in contemporary and conventional Christianity. We are so good-natured, so fastidious, so complacent, so dainty, so nice. But if we had 1/10 of Nahum's passionate love of truth and righteousness, we would at times be filled with a passionate hatred of evil and corruption.

- Raymond Calkins

Modern Message of the Minor Prophets, pp. 86-87

My point here is that there are times when we as individual Christians, or as the church, need to speak out and warn the world of the judgment to come because of sin and disbelief.

4. The Prophet's Book

The book of Nahum may be outlined briefly as follows:

1. The God of Vengeance (1:1-15)

- a. The prophet and his theme (1:1)
- b. God's wrath against sin (1:2-6)
- c. God's mercy towards the faithful (1:7)
- d. God's pursuit of His enemies (1:8)

The first chapter is an alphabetical acrostic which is a Hebrew literary device where each verse begins with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet (an acrostic doesn't have to include all the letters of the alphabet – the purposeful arrangement is what constitutes the device).

2. Nineveh's Distress (1:9-2:13)

- a. Her overthrow to be complete (1:9-15)
- b. A prophetic vision of the coming siege (2:1-7)
 1. Preparation for battle (2:1-4)
 2. The futility of it all (2:5-7)
- c. The plundering of the city (2:8-13)
 1. The confused flight of the people (2:8-10)
 2. The completeness of destruction (2:11-13)

3. Reasons for Nineveh's Doom (3:1-19)

- a. Her sins (3:1-7)
 - 1. Description of the battle (3:1-3)
 - 2. The cause of doom specified (3:4)
 - 3. Her shame uncovered by God (3:5-7)
- b. The impossibility of her survival (3:8-19)
 - 1. Nineveh to share the fate of Thebes (3:8-11)
 - 2. Her resources will not avail to save her (3:12-19)

Unlike other prophets, there is no section of Nahum's book that promised better days or a time of redemption. Nahum pronounces the final judgment and destruction of Nineveh.

SUMMARY OF THE CONTENT OF NAHUM'S BOOK

Chapter one presents Jehovah as a jealous and avenging God who punishes evil. Wicked Nineveh will be destroyed while those who trust in God will be spared. The divine wrath would be like fire, like an overwhelming flood. The Assyrian yoke on the people of Judah would be broken and the once-proud oppressors would go to the grave!

Chapter two pictures the sending of a powerful army against Nineveh. The city was to be conquered. It would be utterly destroyed. Judah would rejoice. (Note: So thorough was the devastation of Nineveh that it was not until 1845 that the site was identified, and the ruins uncovered. Archaeology has confirmed the Biblical account of its destruction. (Zephaniah 2:13-15).

Chapter three informs men that Nineveh has brought this terrible fate upon herself. Like a harlot who uses her charms to seduce men, so had Nineveh used her prestige, power, and other enticements to trap, plunder, and destroy whole nations. God's destruction would soon come upon this evil city. No power would be able to prevent his wrath!

LESSONS FOR TODAY

1. For a nation to survive, it must be founded upon and guided by the principle of righteousness.

Otherwise, God will dig a grave for that people and deliver them into it (1:14). God is still sovereign over the nations today.

2. Humility and penitence do not necessarily perpetuate themselves in a family or nation.

Nineveh repented with sincerity in Jonah's day only to have become totally depraved by the time Nahum came on the scene. The truth must be taught anew to every successive generation. This includes us today in the church and in the nation.

3. Faithfulness during turmoil.

The book assures that God is a refuge to those who trust in Him, even in the midst of troubling circumstances (I.e. political unrest, economic uncertainty, conflict between nations, natural disaster, etc.).

These types of things are a given for life in a sinful world. The only true protection, comfort, and hope is faith in God and His promises.

HABAKKUK

1. The Prophet

We now move on to the prophet Habakkuk who lived in the Southern Kingdom and warned of its eventual destruction.

The name Habakkuk means "clasp" or "embrace". Martin Luther applied the meaning of this prophet's name to the task he performed among the people of Judah. He wrote:

“ He embraces his people, and takes them to his arms, i.e. he comforts them and holds them up, as one embraces a weeping child or person to quiet it with the assurance that if God will, it shall be better soon”

- Keil and Delitzsch,
The Commentary on the Old Testament, II, 49

The prophet's name appears nowhere in Scripture except in this book. His home is unknown. We know nothing of his occupation.

The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw.
- **Habakkuk 1:1**

Unlike many of the other Minor Prophets, Habakkuk does not date his prophecy by referring to the king or kings during whose reign he ministered. But 1:6 appears to throw some light on this problem. Assyria had fallen and Chaldea (Babylon) was not yet the world power. This change of power occurred in 612 BC. Yet the Chaldeans had not, at the time of Habakkuk's ministry,

invaded Judah (3:16). This invasion did come in 605 BC. Thus, the book is dated somewhere between 612 and 605 BC.

Habakkuk was a contemporary of Jeremiah and came on the scene only shortly after Nahum.

Babylon's conquest of the Southern Kingdom took place in phases between 605 BC when Nebuchadnezzar II made the first of many attacks against the Southern Kingdom, these culminated in 587 BC when he finally conquered and destroyed Jerusalem and carried the people into captivity for 70 years.

2. The Prophet's Time

Habakkuk lived at the time of Chaldean supremacy in history. This new power had defeated the Assyrians and would soon conquer Egypt. It was inevitable that Judah would also feel the force of the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar.

The prophet foretold the catastrophe which was about to come and lived to see it happen. However, we don't know if he was killed, carried off or remained in Judah.

In spite of the warnings of impending disaster from Jeremiah and Habakkuk, the hearts of the Jews were still set on sin. Social injustice and moral corruption were widespread. Idolatry was rampant in the land. The time was ripe for judgment upon these wicked people whom God had blessed so richly. The Chaldeans were to serve as instruments of God's wrath upon his people!

3. The Prophet's Message

The fact that God was about to use a pagan people who were even more wicked than the Jews they were being used to punish,

forms the basis for the book of Habakkuk. Where is the justice in such a situation? How can it be right for these pagans to prosper at the expense of God's own people?

The form of the book of Habakkuk is unique. The other Minor Prophets plead with the people on behalf of God. But this prophet pleads with God on behalf of the people! Habakkuk dialogues with God over this inability to understand what is happening in the land.

I will stand on my guard post
And station myself on the rampart;
And I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me,
And how I may reply when I am reproved.
- **Habakkuk 2:1**

The crucial answer given to Habakkuk is found in 2:4b:

"Behold, as for the proud one,
His soul is not right within him;
But the righteous will live by his faith.
- **Habakkuk 2:4**

Surely the nature of this book makes it one of immediate concern to men today. Do we not ask why the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? Do we not puzzle over the ways of God? Habakkuk, the Job of the Minor Prophets, is interesting for this reason alone. He questions God, not for what is happening to himself, but rather how God is dealing with his own people – Why use a wicked, ungodly people to discipline the actual people of God?

4. The Prophet's Book

The book of Habakkuk may be outlined briefly as follows:

1. Habakkuk's First Question and God's Reply (1:1-11)

- a. Title of the book (1:1)
- b. Question: Why does God tolerate sin among his people? (1:2-4)
- c. Reply: God is raising up the Chaldeans to punish the wrongdoers (1:5-11)

2. Habakkuk's Second Question and God's Reply (1:12-2:20)

- a. Question: How can God use the ungodly Chaldeans to punish his own people? (1:12-2:1)
- b. Reply: The Chaldeans shall be punished in turn (2:2-20)
 - 1. The contrast between pride and faith (2:2-5)
 - 2. Five woes pronounced on Chaldea (2:6-20)
 - 3. Woe upon the lust for conquest (2:6-8)
 - 3. Woe upon covetousness (2:9-11)
 - 3. Woe upon the building of cities with blood (2:12-14)
 - 4. Woe upon intoxication and violence (2:15-17)
 - 5. Woe upon idolatry (2:18-20)

3. Habakkuk's Prayer (3:1-19)

- a. A petition for mercy (3:1-2)
- b. Confidence based on the past (3:3-15)
- c. The prophet's faith expressed (3:16-19)
 - 1. Confidence amid fear (3:16)
 - 2. Rejoicing in God's integrity (3:17-19)

SUMMARY OF THE CONTENT OF HABAKKUK'S BOOK

Chapter one raises the problem of sin and violence in Judah. The prophet cries, "How long?" God answers by informing Habakkuk that he knows of this awful condition and is preparing to bring the Chaldeans against these people to punish them. This, in turn, causes the prophet to ask how God can punish Judah with a nation more wicked than itself.

Chapter two answers the second question by revealing that the Chaldeans shall also be punished and sets forth the fundamental principle of God's dealing with men, proud men who refuse to trust God must suffer whereas those who are righteous because of their faith in God will live.

Chapter three is a psalm of confident trust. Having raised the difficult problems of chapters one and two, Habakkuk declares that he has enough evidence of God's integrity to trust him in the face of the great adversity which was coming.

5. The Prophet's Message

1. Despite change in time, God still requires the same things. Also, perspective affects our worship to God in various ways.

2. It is difficult to worship God when we see him through the perspective of trouble, illness, etc. - Some think that God is their "deliverer, this is their perspective. However, what happens when God doesn't deliver? How to worship Him then? How Do You see Him then? Habakkuk deals with these questions.

A. Chapter 1 - The prophet questions God because the God he perceived as a deliverer was not delivering the people.

- God responds that He is working a plan that the prophet cannot understand (I.e. that God is using an evil nation to discipline His own people).
- The prophet and God dialogue back and forth over this issue. The prophet does not understand this action on God's part - this is not in His character (from Habakkuk's perspective).

B. Chapter 2 - The prophet stops the dialogue and chooses to wait for God's answer.

- God reassures him that He is working a plan and tells the prophet to tell the people that He has a plan and regardless of the problem, the righteous must live by faith (this is true in every generation). This is the believer's "zone" regardless of the circumstance.
- God asks Habakkuk to get the proper "perspective" on God and the situation (2:20) - God is in control, do not

judge Him by events only. When you know this, you have the proper perspective. (He is in control, and we should respond with worship and praise, and respect.)

- David in Psalm 46:10 summarizes this with few words, "Be still and know that I am God."
- Job thought he had the proper perspective on God until God actually spoke and explained what the proper perspective should be for him as a human being.

C. Chapter 3 - Habakkuk explains his new perspective - vs. 17.

Though the fig tree should not blossom
And there be no fruit on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail
And the fields produce no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold
And there be no cattle in the stalls,
- Habakkuk 3:17

Even though there is no deliverance, the prophet will continue trusting, praising and obeying God. We refer to this perspective or attitude as perseverance.

LESSONS FOR TODAY

1. All men and all nations are in the power of God.

He may tolerate their sin for a time, but He will eventually render them their just reward – this is certain!

2. Habakkuk shows that men can/must hold fast to their faith in the goodness and power of God even/especially in the midst of great trials

See the Book of Job for further information.

3. Chapter three emphasizes that evil is eventually self-destructive.

A nation so wicked as Babylon carried within itself the seeds of its own destruction.

4. If we understand who God is (not a Being fitted to our perspective) but rather who He really is and who we truly are, we will be brought to silence because of His majesty.

This is the correct balance when we have an accurate perspective of God.

We can then be still and know that He is God.



READING ASSIGNMENT

RE-READ: NAHUM / HABAKKUK

READ: ZEPHANIAH / HAGGAI

8.

Zephaniah / Haggai

In this chapter we'll be looking at one of the last prophets to minister to the Southern Kingdom before its exile (Zephaniah), and a man who was called to ministry while living during the Jewish return from exile (Haggai).

ZEPHANIAH

1. The Prophet

The name Zephaniah means "Jehovah hides" or "he whom Jehovah has hidden."

The word of the Lord which came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah:

- **Zephaniah 1:1**

The first verse of this chapter traces his ancestry back for four generations. He was the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son

Amariah, the son of Hezekiah (or Hizkiah, KJV). Since this is the only prophet to trace his ancestry in this fashion, it is generally believed that the Hezekiah specified was none other than the good king of Judah who reigned in the days of Isaiah and Micah. This would mean that Zephaniah was not only a prophet, but also a prince.

Zephaniah was familiar with the conditions in Jerusalem and referred to that city in such a way as to make it likely that it was his home. There is no information given concerning his occupation or other details of his life.

This prophet's ministry was carried out during the reign of Josiah (640-609 BC). The prophecy of this book was likely given during the period just prior to the reforms begun by Josiah in 621 BC. His preaching likely served to help bring about these reforms.

Like other Minor Prophets, Zephaniah's message includes a description of sin and unfaithfulness; a call to repentance and a promise of redemption, however Zephaniah focused on the "Day of the Lord" as judgment more than others and he not only speaks about judgment on the Southern Kingdom, but on other nations, as well as a final universal judgment to come.

"Therefore wait for Me," declares the Lord,
"For the day when I rise up as a witness.
Indeed, My decision is to gather nations,
To assemble kingdoms,
To pour out on them My indignation,
All My burning anger;
For all the earth will be devoured
By the fire of My zeal.
- **Zephaniah 3:8**

2. The Prophet's Time

Good King Hezekiah had been followed to the throne by his wicked son Manasseh. He reintroduced idolatry into the land and set out to undo the things that his father had done in the land. Amon, who succeeded Manasseh to the throne, also followed in his father's wicked steps. His reign was one of great wickedness. Manasseh and Amon turned the people away from their God.

When Amon was assassinated, his eight-year-old son came to the throne. This son, Josiah, was the last good king to reign over Judah. At sixteen, he began to seek after God. At the age of twenty, he began to purge the land of the trappings of idolatry. In the process of having the temple in Jerusalem repaired, a copy of the long-forsaken "book of the law" was found (II Kings 22:3-10). This book was taken to the king and read before him. Upon hearing its teachings and exhortations, Josiah set about to establish an extensive series of religious and social reforms. Idolatrous priests were slain, and purity in worship was restored (See II Kings 22-23 and II Chronicles 34-35 for the biblical account of these events).

Zephaniah's prophecy evidently occurred just prior to these reforms, for he addresses himself to a corrupt, carnal and cruel people. Idolatry was still in the land and the nation deserved punishment.

¹ Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled,
The tyrannical city!

² She heeded no voice,
She accepted no instruction.
She did not trust in the Lord,
She did not draw near to her God.

³ Her princes within her are roaring lions,

Her judges are wolves at evening;
They leave nothing for the morning.
⁴ Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men;
Her priests have profaned the sanctuary.
They have done violence to the law.
⁵ The Lord is righteous within her;
He will do no injustice.
Every morning He brings His justice to light;
He does not fail.
But the unjust knows no shame.
⁶ "I have cut off nations;
Their corner towers are in ruins.
I have made their streets desolate,
With no one passing by;
Their cities are laid waste,
Without a man, without an inhabitant.
⁷ "I said, 'Surely you will revere Me,
Accept instruction.'
So her dwelling will not be cut off
According to all that I have appointed concerning her.
But they were eager to corrupt all their deeds.
- Zephaniah 3:1-7

3. The Prophet's Message

A. This book has judgment as its theme.

It looks to the coming of the "day of the Lord". Its pronouncements are clear and unsparing. Judah had been a sinful nation, and its day of grace has passed. Doom was in the offing. The Babylonians would strike soon - in 605 BC.

Zephaniah not only foretells judgment of his own people but also speaks of the fate of the surrounding nations.

B. History of Destruction of Jerusalem

The destruction of this great city was not accomplished with a single blow but was eventually realized in a series of events over a 19–20 year period.

1. Battle of Carchemish

In 605 BC the Babylonians, led by Nebuchadnezzar II, decisively defeated the Egyptian and Assyrian forces at the Battle of Carchemish. This victory solidified Babylon's control over the region north of Israel.

2. Subjugation of Judah

After the Battle of Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar II naturally turned his attention to Judah. Judah was a vassal state of the Babylonians, and its king, Jehoiakim, had initially been loyal to Egypt, placing it between the two great powers of that day, Egypt to the south and Babylon to the north.

3. First Deportation

Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and during this time he took select members of the royal family and nobility as captives to Babylon. Among them were Daniel and his friends, who later became prominent figures in the Babylonian court. – 605 BC.

4. Establishment of Babylonian Rule

Following the invasion, Nebuchadnezzar placed Jehoiakim under tribute and Judah became a vassal state under Babylonian control.

5. Prophetic Context

The events of this period are prophesied in the Bible, particularly in the books of Daniel and Jeremiah, as well as the book we are looking at here, Zephaniah. These prophets warned about the impending judgment and exile due to the disobedience of the people of Judah.

6. Later phases of Babylonian Conquest

The invasion of 605 BC was just the beginning of Babylon's actions against Judah. Subsequent invasions occurred in 597 BC and 587 BC, leading to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the beginning of the mass exile of the Jewish population to Babylon.

7. Fall of Babylon

The Babylonians themselves were defeated by the Medo-Persian Empire led by Cyrus the Great in 539 BC. The following year, 538 BC Cyrus released the first wave of Jewish exiles led by Zerubbabel and Joshua to return to Jerusalem (67 years after the original exile). In the year 458 BC a second wave returned with Ezra. In the year 445 BC Nehemiah, a Jewish exile who served as cup bearer to the king was sent to rebuild the protective wall around the city of Jerusalem.

C. Warning

Zephaniah's book warns about the judgment in the form of the Babylonian Invasion of 605 BC. However, the book does not paint a totally bleak picture. A clear promise of mercy and restoration is also set forth. The Lord desired to have a purified people and accomplished this transformation with the terrible defeat and captivity the Jews suffered at the hands of the Babylonians. These events, however, eventually looked forward to the hope of bringing of a remnant of the Jewish people back to their homeland (under Zerubbabel and Ezra) and, ultimately, the establishment of the reign of the Messiah with the coming of Jesus.

Zephaniah's prophecy about the judgment, exile, and eventual return from Babylonian captivity originally spoken of by Jeremiah (70 years) and now by Zephaniah will set up the ministry of Haggai which will take place during the return of the exiles in a little less than a century.

4. The Prophet's Book

The book of Zephaniah may be outlined briefly as follows:

I. The Day of the Lord (1:1-2:3)

1. Superscription (1:1)
2. God's righteous judgment upon the word (1:2-6)
 1. Upon the entire earth (1:2-3)
 2. Upon Judah and Jerusalem in particular (1:4-6)
3. Sinners of every land to be judged (1:7-13)
4. The Day of the Lord is near (1:14-18)

1. A terrible time of wrath (1:14-17)
2. No escape by carnal means (1:13)
5. An appeal for men to seek deliverance from God (2:1-3)

II. **The Judgment of Nations (2:4-3:8)**

1. Judgment against all nations (2:4-15)
 1. Small nations nearby (2:4-11)
 2. Great nations afar off (2:12-15)
2. If the heathen are punished, Judah cannot escape either (3:1-8)
 1. Woe to the polluted city of Jerusalem (3:1-7)
 2. Its rejection of God demanded punishment (3:8)

III. **Salvation for the Remnant (3:9-20)**

1. A righteous remnant to be gathered from among the heathen (3:9-10)
2. The remnant to be cleansed and sanctified (3:11-13)
3. Israel exalted before all (3:14-20)

The first section of the book (1:1-2:3) announces a universal and consuming judgment against the earth. Judah and Jerusalem - without excuse in their sinfulness - are especially singled out for wrath. All of this will come on the day of the Lord. The only hope on that day will be to turn to God in repentance.

The second section (2:4-3:8) makes it clear that no nation would escape judgment on the day of the Lord. The sins of the heathens and the despicable idolatry of Judah demanded that God, in his holiness, punish men. The prophet makes it clear that this

punishment was not to be viewed as an end in itself but as a means of bringing men to salvation through chastisement.

The third section (3:9-20) presents the glory which the penitent and purified people would receive after the judgment already described. The restoration of the Jews to their land under Zerubbabel and Ezra is envisioned here. But, beyond that, the salvation of the Messianic era is foreseen. This is regarded as Messianic prophecy.

LESSONS FOR TODAY

1. All men and nations are within the power of God and are accountable to Him, then as well as now.

Even today, nations including our own can face God's chastisement for its evil (abortion, political corruption, sexual immorality). God didn't ignore the corporate sins of the nations then and He doesn't and will not leave unpunished the godlessness, depravity, and arrogance of nations today.

2. The Day of the Lord (as the term was used in the Minor Prophets) was the day on which a nation received its just due for sin.

These times in history all foreshadow the ultimate day of the Lord when all men will be judged before the Lord Jesus Christ.

³⁰ Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, ³¹ because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having

furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

- Acts 17:30-31

In other words, there have been many instances of God's judgment coming in various ways (floods, famines, military defeats, economic disasters, etc.) referred to as "the day of the Lord". However, there will be a final "day of the Lord" or final judgment when Jesus returns to judge everyone, the living and the dead and set into motion an eternity of joy or an eternity of suffering.

The lesson here is that there is no excuse for not being ready. We've seen examples of warning being fulfilled; we've heard the gospel ourselves, and we've been taught to be ready at all times for the Master's return. We've even been told that He will come when we least expect Him to appear. So, there is no excuse! We need to be ready for the Lord's coming for us in death or His sudden arrival at the end of the world.

The core lessons of Zephaniah are related:

1. Repent if you need to.
2. Be ready at all times because God's judgment is coming and is sure.

HAGGAI

We now move on to the three Minor Prophets who served after the Jews were returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel. The first of these was Haggai and his prophecies were given around 516-515 BC and directed at Zerubbabel and the people he led (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi).

1. The Prophet

The name Haggai means "festival of Jehovah". We know practically nothing about the prophet himself. He is mentioned not only in the book bearing his name but also in Ezra 5:1 and Ezra 6:14.

Haggai had been a captive in Babylon and had returned to his homeland with the remnant under Zerubbabel. He and Zechariah were contemporaries and worked toward the common goal of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. They grew up during the time of the initial return to Jerusalem with the first wave of people freed from exile.

The ministry of this prophet is easily dated from the first verse of the book. The "second year of Darius the king" would have been 520 BC. From the four dates given in the book (1:1, 2:1, 2:10, 2:20), it would appear that his primary work among the people was done in a period of only four months. But as brief as his ministry may have been, it was effective.

1. Haggai 1:1 – Second year of Darius (520 BC) – Day 1:
Month 6
2. Haggai 2:1 – Second year of Darius (520 BC) – Day 21:
Month 7

3. Haggai 2:10 – Second year of Darius (520 BC) – Day 24: Month 9
4. Haggai 2:20 – Second year of Darius (520 BC) – Day 24: Month 9

2. The Prophet's Time

In undertaking to see this book in its correct historical setting, we must understand that a full hundred years had passed after the work of Zephaniah when Haggai undertook his mission for Jehovah. Many important things had happened in this century.

Zephaniah had indicated that Judah's day of grace had passed, and that Jehovah's judgment was inescapable. This judgment came at the hands of the Babylonians who, under Nebuchadnezzar, first invaded Judah in 605 BC. An ill-fated revolt against the Babylonians brought an even worse invasion in 587 BC. Jerusalem was burned, the temple was destroyed, and more captives were taken. Daniel and Ezekiel prophesied among the exiles in Babylon and sought to keep hope alive among the people.

After Nebuchadnezzar's death in 562 BC, a series of weak kings followed. The Babylonian Empire deteriorated to the point that in 539 BC, King Cyrus of Persia captured the city of Babylon.

Cyrus showed a benevolent attitude toward the Jewish exiles in Babylonia. In 538 BC, he made a decree allowing them to return to their native land. (See II Chronicles 36 and Ezra 1 for the biblical account of this decree.) In 536 BC, the first group, numbering about forty thousand, made their journey home. Led by Zerubbabel, they began rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. The foundation of the temple was laid. But then, because of threats

made by various tribes in the area, work on the temple was halted. Nothing more was done until fifteen or sixteen years later when Haggai and Zechariah began their ministries.

The Jews were obviously dispirited and wretched when these two prophets came among them. Jerusalem and the other cities of Judea were in ruins. The walls were torn down. The land had not been worked and was thus poor and unproductive. People now living in the area were hostile to the returning Jews.

The enthusiasm and hope of the early settlers had dissipated because they had abandoned their primary task of rebuilding the temple and as a consequence the other parts of their lives had been negatively affected as well. Both Haggai and Zechariah had been witnesses to this decline as they grew up during this time period.

3. The Prophet's Message

Haggai has been described as a man with a single idea. His primary message was this: Build the temple. He attributed the people's lack of success in all areas of their lives to the single fact that they had abandoned the task of rebuilding the House of God (the Temple).

³ Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, ⁴ "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?" ⁵ Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, "Consider your ways! ⁶ You have sown much, but harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm

enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes."

⁷ Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Consider your ways! ⁸ Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified," says the Lord. ⁹ "You look for much, but behold, it comes to little; when you bring it home, I blow it away. Why?" declares the Lord of hosts, "Because of My house which lies desolate, while each of you runs to his own house. ¹⁰ Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. ¹¹ I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands."

¹² Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him. And the people showed reverence for the Lord. ¹³ Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke by the commission of the Lord to the people saying, "'I am with you,' declares the Lord." ¹⁴ So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, ¹⁵ on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of Darius the king.

- Haggai 1:3-15

Note that the leader and the people responded to Haggai's preaching in less than a month! He preached on the 1st of the 6th month and the people responded on the 24th of the 6th month.

4. The Prophet's Book

The book of Haggai may be outlined briefly as follows:

- I. **First Message: Rebuke for Neglecting the Temple (1:1-15)**
 - a. The prophet and his commission (1:1)
 - b. The selfish indifference of the people (1:2-4)
 - c. The curse resulting from their attitude (1:5-6)
 - d. God's displeasure with the people (1:7-11)
 - e. The response of the people (1:12-15)
 - f. Second Message: Glory of the New Temple (2:1-9)
- II. **God's blessing to abide with the builders (2:1-5)**
 - a. The glory of the new temple to exceed that of the former temple (2:6-9)
- III. **Third Message: Condition of Future Prosperity (2:10-19)**
 - a. The present uncleanness of the people (2:10-14)
 - i. Two questions about uncleanness (2:10-13)
 - ii. Application to the people (2:14)

- b. A change of heart would result in a change of their material circumstances (2:15-19)

IV. Fourth Message: A Glorious Future (2:20-23)

- a. Surrounding nations to be overthrown (2:20-22)
- b. The promise of the Messiah to be vouchsafed through the preservation of Zerubbabel (2:23)

SUMMARY OF THE CONTENT OF HAGGAI'S BOOK

The first message (1:1-15) brought a stinging rebuke to the people for building their own houses and looking to establish their material prosperity before looking to their spiritual obligations. Unless God's work is put first in one's life, everything else to which he puts his hand will eventually fail him. The people were brought to repentance by this straight-forward challenge.

The second message (2:1-9) was designed to encourage the builders who had undertaken the task of rebuilding the temple. They were assured that God was with them in their work.

The third message (2:10-19) was designed to teach the people that their sacrifices and external rituals would be in vain if they did not purify their hearts. As surely as their impure hearts and disobedient lives had brought curses in the past, pure hearts and obedient lives would bring blessings in the future.

The fourth message (2:20-23) is a Messianic prophecy. Zerubbabel, the first ruler of restored Israel and a descendant of David, is allowed to symbolize the Messianic line. God had not forgotten His promise to send] the Messiah (cf. Matthew 1:12; Luke 1:32-33). This was the "big picture".

THE UNIQUENESS OF HAGGAI'S PREACHING

Haggai's preaching is unique among the prophets primarily because of its focus on a specific practical task: the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. Here are some aspects of Haggai's preaching that distinguish it from the messages of other prophets:

1. Practical Emphasis

While many prophets delivered messages of judgment, repentance, and spiritual renewal, Haggai's primary concern was the physical rebuilding of the Temple. His preaching was focused on motivating and encouraging the people to prioritize this task.

2. Historical Context

Haggai's messages were delivered during a specific historical period, the early Persian period, after the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon. His preaching addressed the challenges and opportunities faced by the community at that time.

3. Directness and Clarity

Haggai's messages are relatively straightforward and direct. He presents clear instructions and challenges to the people, urging them to consider their priorities and commit to the task of rebuilding the Temple.

4. Immediate Response

Unlike some other prophets whose messages often faced resistance or were not immediately acted upon, Haggai's preaching resulted in an immediate response from the people.

They heeded his call and began work on the Temple soon after his messages were delivered.

5. Encouragement and Hope

While Haggai's preaching contains elements of rebuke and admonition for the people's neglect of the Temple, it also offers words of encouragement and hope. He assures the people of God's presence and promises blessings for their obedience in rebuilding the Temple.

6. Divine Authority

Haggai's preaching carries the weight of Divine authority. He speaks as a mouthpiece of God, conveying God's will and purposes to the people. This aspect of his preaching underscores the importance and urgency of the task at hand.

Overall, Haggai's preaching stands out for its practicality, immediacy, and clear focus on a specific task related to the physical restoration of Jerusalem's spiritual center, the Temple. His messages played a crucial role in motivating the community to take action and prioritize the rebuilding of the Temple during a critical period in Jewish history.

ONE LESSON FROM HAGGAI FOR TODAY

1. There is a common connection between blessings and faithfulness.

I am not saying that if you are faithful, you will be rich, healthy, and never have any problems. We all know that the opposite is often true for those who make a great effort to remain faithful.

The blessings of faithfulness are not necessarily physical in nature, but the sure blessings of faithfulness are the following:

A. Assurance

- We have confidence that we are doing God's will, and He is pleased with us.
- We have confidence in our salvation because Jesus promises that those who are faithful to the end will be saved – Matthew 24:13.

B. Peace

- Those who are faithful experience the peace that passes understanding (which means that our peace of mind is not based on human reasoning, mediation, or wealth, but rather is a gift from God) – Philippians 4:7.

C. Spiritual Vision and Insight

- Only the faithful can hear God and see God as the Holy Spirit reveals Him through His word.
- Non-believers and the unfaithful see only this world and this life – I Corinthians 2:12.

D. Faithfulness gives birth to and nourishes hope

We can bear hardship and we can avoid the seduction of wealth in this world because we have a secure hope for another life to come with Christ (Romans 15:13).

Haggai's preaching affirms the truth that God is faithful in His promise to bless us if we remain faithful – sometimes these blessings are material, sometimes spiritual, and many times they are both.

The key to building our ability to be faithful is to continually make spiritual matters a priority in life. This is how we exercise the faithfulness muscle.



READING ASSIGNMENT

RE-READ: ZEPHANIAH / HAGGAI

READ: ZECHARIAH / MALACHI

9.

Zechariah / Malachi

Our final chapter looks at two prophets who were very different in style and content. Zechariah providing encouragement using visions and Messianic prophecy, while Malachi deals with a specific problem using language and images that are readily understandable and practical to implement.

ZECHARIAH

1. The Prophet

The name Zechariah was a rather common name among the Jews and means "Jehovah remembers" or "whom Jehovah remembers. There are over twenty-five people by this name mentioned in the Old Testament. This one can be identified easily by means of several references to him in the text.

Zechariah was "the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo" (1:1). Ezra refers to him simply as "the son of Iddo" (Ezra 5:1; Ezra 6:14). This is not a discrepancy or error in the Bible. The Hebrew language does not have a word corresponding to our word "grandson". The word "son" was therefore used to signify a son, a

grandson or, in an even more general sense, a descendant of more distant generations.

Zechariah was not only a prophet but also of a priestly family. He was born and reared in Babylon during Judah's captivity there. He returned from Babylon under the leadership of Zerubbabel in 536 BC (cf. Nehemiah 12:1, 4, 16). He was still a very young man when he began prophesying in 520 BC and his youthful zeal was undoubtedly complementary to the old prophet Haggai in their contemporary ministries.

It is interesting to note both Zechariah and Haggai were called into ministry in the same year and only a few months apart.

In the second year of Darius the king, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying,

- Haggai 1:1

In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah the prophet, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo saying,

- Zechariah 1:1

Aside from his parentage (son of Berechiah and Iddo (priests during exile) and the fact that he preached to the people in Jerusalem while they rebuilt the city and Temple after their return from exile, no other information in the Bible is given about Zechariah.

2. The Prophet's Time

The ministries of Haggai and Zechariah occurred in the same historical setting.

The seventy-year captivity in Babylon was over and the Jews had been back in their homeland for sixteen years. They had been tending to their own personal affairs during this period but had neglected their responsibilities to God. The temple was not yet rebuilt, Jerusalem and its walls were in ruins and the people were dispirited.

It was under these circumstances, in 520 BC, that Haggai received his first message from the Lord for the people. Two months later, Zechariah was called to the same kind of work. Whereas Haggai's work lasted only a few months, Zechariah's ministry relative to the rebuilding of the temple covered at least two full years. Charles Pledge compares the two in his book entitled, "Getting Acquainted with the Old Testament." He writes:

"The work of Haggai and Zechariah complement each other as does all work of faithful evangelists today. Haggai offered some stern rebuke and plain admonition as well as encouragement, but Zechariah dealt primarily in encouraging words and visions which would bolster the sagging faith of a weak people. As some of the older men recalled the former glory which they had enjoyed, especially the Temple, and then observed their present weakness, it is easy to understand the disheartening attitude that developed. However, with the combined efforts of Haggai and Zechariah, the work of the Lord was accomplished. They were a great pair; the old and the young together working for God."

After the initial excitement and enthusiasm experienced by the Jews at their Providential return to their homeland and the rush

to begin rebuilding the Temple – reality set in with opposition from neighboring peoples and the magnitude of the work. The people were in shock and had fallen back to the safety of the familiar.

3. The Prophet's Message

Zechariah is the longest book of the Minor Prophets. The average length of books by the other Minor Prophets was about 5 chapters, however, Zechariah's book was almost three times as long at 14 chapters.

His book is the most complex as it contains apocalyptic symbolism as well as numerous visions, not easily interpreted. Add to these abundant references to a future Messiah (more than any other Minor Prophet) and you have a very challenging work to summarize and explain in the brief time and space that we have.

One helpful thing we can do is to provide you with some basic information about apocalyptic symbolism, a literary device used by several prophets of the Old Testament (Daniel, Zechariah), as well as figures in the New Testament (Jesus in Matthew 24-25; Apostle John – Revelation).

Apocalyptic symbolism typically deals with themes related to the "end times", Divine judgment, and/or the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom.

The word Apocalypse comes from the Greek word Apokalypsis which means to uncover or remove the cover. Apocalyptic symbolism refers to the uncovering or revealing of certain truths concerning the end times, the judgment of God, or the coming

triumph of God's will and kingdom using symbolic imagery, vision, or language.

Some of the characteristics of apocalyptic symbolism used by all prophets including Zechariah include the following:

1. **Vivid imagery** – cosmic events, supernatural beings, heavenly visions to evoke awe and wonder in the reader.
2. **Symbolic numbers and colors** – used to convey abstract concepts or spiritual realities (#7 = completeness / perfection; color white = purity).
3. **Animal Imagery** – Depictions of strange or other worldly creatures (dragons, hybrid creatures – lion with a man's face) to symbolize worldly powers, cosmic entities, spiritual powers.
4. **Cosmic Catastrophes** – Blood moon, stars falling, etc. – signs of Divine Judgment or the impending end of a certain age.
5. **Angels and Demons** – playing the role of messengers, warriors, or agents of Divine Judgment.
6. **Dualism** – presenting the cosmic struggle between God and Satan, light and darkness, forces of good vs. forces of evil.
7. **End** – Time (eschatological) Themes – the end of the world, judgment, resurrecting Divine thrones, New Jerusalem.

Apocalyptic symbolism serves to convey profound spiritual truths to stimulate awe and confidence in the believer towards

the ultimate victory in the plans of God no matter the present circumstances one is in.

4. The Prophet's Book

1. A call to repentance – 1:1-6
2. Eight visions and their meanings – 1:7-6:15
3. The questions of fasting – 7:1-8:23
4. Prophecies concerning the nations and the kingdom – 9:1-14:21
 1. First Message – 9:1-11:17
 2. Second Message – 12:1-14:21

Some main elements and details of this book include the fact that Zechariah's book is the longest and most difficult book of the 12 Minor Prophets. This, of course, is due to the fact that there is a great deal of Apocalyptic symbolism throughout the book which is not easily familiar to the modern Western mind.

A key thought, however, is that the book was designed to encourage God's people. The triumph of God's purpose among men is assured. However, Zechariah insists that for this to happen, man must be in submission to God's will.

One other fact to note about Zechariah's preaching is his abundant references to the Messiah – commentary writer, Merrill Unger, says that:



Zechariah has more to say about Christ than all of the other Minor Prophets.

- Zechariah, p8, M.U.

Very briefly then, here are the main ideas that make up the content of Zechariah's book:

The First Section – 1:1-6 calls on the people to turn to God in sincere repentance. The prophet urges them to be better than their fathers had been. In their case this would mean returning to the task that had been abandoned – rebuilding the temple.

The Second Section – 1:7-6:15 is a series of visions which are a comprehensive revelation concerning the future of the people God and His kingdom among men. After this he is given the task of crowning Joshua.

Zechariah describes:

A. Horsemen among the myrtle trees – 1:7-17

An Angel explains that they are sent by God to patrol the earth and report on its condition. The vision assures the Jews that God is aware of their situations and will bring about restoration and peace.

B. Vision of Four Horns and Four Craftsman – 1:18-21

The horns represent nations that have scattered Israel. The craftsman represents God's judgment on their nation.

C. Visions of man with measuring line – 2:1-13

Represents Jerusalem being rebuilt but rebuilt beyond its present site. This signifies growth and prosperity in the future as well as God's protection.

D. Vision of Joshua, the high priest – 3:1-10

Joshua in priestly garb before the angel signifies the renewal of acceptable worship to God by the Jews. This renewed priesthood will bring forgiveness of sin for the people.

E. Vision of the Golden Lampstand and the two olive trees – 4:1-14

The two olive trees represent Zerubbabel and Joshua (one a leader of the people and the other a high priest) in the presence of the Spirit of God. This imagery signifies God's appointed leaders once again doing God's work in leading His people in the power and direction of the Holy Spirit – how it once was (Moses and Aaron) and as it is meant to be in order to accomplish God's work in any age.

F. Vision of the flying scroll – 5:1-4

The scroll is the curse that goes over the land of those who steal and swear falsely. It is divine and not human justice – the kind that rules in the kingdom of God.

G. Vision of a woman in a basket – 5:5-11

A woman called wickedness carried off in a basket by storks to Babylon. This symbolizes the cleansing of the land of the wicked influences carried back to the holy city and Temple from Babylon, now being purified and sent back to its source.

H. Vision of the four chariots – 6:1-8

Zechariah sees four chariots coming out from two mountains of bronze. These represent the four spirits of heaven going out to patrol the earth (North, South, East, West). These symbolize

divine judgment upon the nations and the establishment of God's rule over the entire earth.

I. The Crowning of Joshua – 6:9-15

This action represents the dual nature of Joshua's rule as king and priest which symbolizes a restoration of the ideal theocratic government. The crowning is also a Messianic foreshadowing in that when the Messiah would come, He would perfectly fulfill both kingly and priestly roles. Also, the naming of one of the crowns as "branch" uses another common figure for the Messiah to come. In the end, God's command to crown Joshua in Zechariah 6:9-15 symbolizes the restoration of spiritual and political leadership in Israel, anticipating the coming of the Messiah, and offering hope for a future of peace and prosperity under God's rule.

Note that even though the visions are bizarre and disheartening, even difficult to understand, none of them represent a curse or punishment on the Jews. Each one represents a blessing of some kind and taken together provide a great encouragement for them at a time of difficulty and challenge.

Getting back to the summary of the content of Zechariah's book:

1. A call to repentance – 1:1-6
2. The eight visions and command to crown Joshua – 1:7-6:15
3. An admonition that nothing can be substituted for complete and sincere obedience to God – 8:23.
The problem was a familiar one. Religious leaders emphasizing rules on fasting and other religious

practices while neglecting to practice basic justice and mercy for those who were weak and in need.

4. God's promises for the future – 9:14-21

1. In conflicts between Jerusalem and heathen nations, Jerusalem would be victorious.
The future would bring doom to these nations but would also bring the Messiah to Jerusalem – Ch. 9-11.
2. The future would bring a sifting that would separate fleshly Israel from spiritual Israel.

LESSONS FOR TODAY

1. Repentance is the first step in the process of renewal.

Note that before Zechariah described his visions of blessings and success for the future, he insisted that God required repentance first. The Jews had to change their ways. For them it wasn't great sins like idolatry or sexual immorality, it was returning to the original work of rebuilding the Temple which they had abandoned and thinking that personal acts of religious devotion (fasting) was a substitute for treating others with kindness and mercy.

To this day, any spiritual progress from becoming a Christian, to becoming a better or more mature Christian begins with repentance. Repentance prepares us for spiritual life because in repentance we let something go (some fleshly habit, attitude, thought, act, etc.) and we embrace something spiritual (belief,

Jesus, greater submission to Jesus). So, if you ever pray to God and ask Him to help you, change you, prepare you, improve you – the first thing he will ask of you every time will be to repent.

2. Have faith because we win!

The people he was encouraging were a tiny remnant of the Jewish nation who were rebuilding a city and Temple in order to maintain a spiritual and cultural heritage so that through them some 400 years into the future the Messiah would come to offer Himself for sin and establish the kingdom/church here on earth which would for 2,000 more years preach the gospel, calling people into the kingdom and prepare for Jesus' return some day! Look how far back they were in the scheme of things; how much they didn't know and yet they were stuck with it because God sent them a prophet who used various visions to remind them that at the end... we win! It may not look like it sometimes (rumors of wars, climate change, people leaving the church and sometimes the church leaving people – but Zechariah, John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter, John, Paul, and today the Bible being spoken by Mike says, "Don't be afraid and don't be discouraged because Jesus is coming and, we win!"

MALACHI

As I mentioned before, Zechariah's period was in 520 BC. We now go forward almost a full century in order to review the last of the Minor Prophets, Malachi.

1. The Prophet

The name Malachi means "my messenger". This man was the last writing prophet to serve as Jehovah's messenger to the people under the Law of Moses. His prophecy was followed by the four hundred "silent years" of history. There was no further special revelation from God and His will until the time of John the Baptist and Jesus. No details of the prophet's life are available to us. We know nothing more of him than is revealed in this one book of Scripture. Malachi was possessed of an intense love for the people of God. He therefore spoke to them with great urgency in the streets and marketplaces. He, therefore, spoke boldly and claimed the authority of God for his message. This prophet used a style of teaching and writing known as the didactic-dialectic method. This method later became universal in Jewish schools and synagogues. It is still quite effective in teaching and preaching. It was a kind of Q&A method. For example:

First, the speaker makes a charge or accusation; then the questions or objections of the accused are raised; these are then answered by a withering refutation. Seven distinct examples of this method of (1) affirmation, (2) interrogation and (3) refutation have been noted in his book.

2. The Prophet's Time

The date of this prophecy is determined by material within the book. Scholars are in general agreement that its content agrees with the situation described by Nehemiah. This would place the writing of Malachi at some time between 445 and 425 BC – the time of Nehemiah's governorship.

By way of summary, the people had been home from the exile in Babylon for approximately one hundred years. The Temple had been rebuilt and so had the wall around Jerusalem. However, the condition of the people themselves was spiritually poor. They had returned to their former spiritual indifference and lethargy. The priests were lax and wicked as tithes and offerings were being perverted. The people were questioning the love and justice of God because of their poverty and hard times.

3. The Prophet's Message

Malachi came among this wicked and despairing people charging them with apathy and disloyalty to God. He reassured them the Messiah was coming, but that he would have to punish them because of their sins which he then specified. He thus issued a call for the people to learn obedience to God.

4. The Prophet's Book

The book of Malachi may be outlined briefly as follows:

1. God's Love for His People (1:1-5)
 1. Declared (1:1-2)
 2. Demonstrated (1:3-5)
2. Condemnation of the Unfaithful Priests (1:6-2:9)
 1. Their unworthiness (1:6-14)
 2. God's curse upon them (2:1-9)
3. People Rebuked for Profaning Marriage (2:10-16)
 1. Alien marriages (2:10-12)
 2. The sin of divorce (2:13-16)
4. The Coming of the Lord and the Purging of Israel (2:17-4:6)
 1. A question concerning God's justice (2:17)
 2. The Messiah's coming in judgment (3:1-6)
 3. Neglect of tithes and offerings (3:7-12)
 4. God's justice defended (3:13-4:3)
 5. A call to obedience (4:4)
 6. Elijah and his work (4:5-6)

The first section of the book (1:1-5) is an affirmation of the love of God for His people.

The second section (1.6-2:9) moves immediately to show how that love had been spurned. The priests had been faithless and had become stumbling blocks to the entire nation.

Section three (2:10-16) is a strict rebuke of the people in general for their widespread sins against marriage. God would no longer accept their sacrifices because of their participation in and toleration of alien marriages, unfaithfulness and sinfulness resulting in divorce. (Their faithlessness in marriage was a reflection of the failure in their relationship with God).

The fourth section of Malachi (2:17-4:6) begins with a rebuke against the Jews for having lost faith in God. The prophet asks, *"Do heathens appear to prosper while God's people suffer?"* God's reckoning with people is not to be judged in the light of a temporary physical condition, but in view of the coming separation of the righteous from the wicked. Thus, the people are urged to be obedient. The Messiah will come and bring blessings to the faithful, but he will also bring judgment!

The Old Testament closes with the work of John the Baptist.

⁵ "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. ⁶ He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

- **Malachi 4:5-6**

It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

- Luke 1:17

This is an angel speaking to Zacharias, John the Baptist's father, in announcing that his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son.

LESSONS FOR TODAY

1. Simple indifference toward worship and service to God is judged as a grievous sin.

God cannot bless such a person until his attitude changes. Sometimes there's a connection between our lack of worship and lack of blessings. God still requires sincere worship even if our worship today is less complex and demanding than the sacrificial system under the law.

2. There really is a judgment coming!

¹ For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the Lord of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." ² "But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. ³ You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing," says the Lord of hosts.

- **Malachi 4:1-3**

The simple message of the last prophet in the Old Testament is that God will judge the wicked and reward the faithful. If all the prophecies made were fulfilled, there is no reason to doubt that this final one will also be fulfilled.

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