

Old Testament #6: Minor Prophets

HOSEA – GOD’S STEADFAST LOVE FOR HIS PEOPLE

BACKGROUND

1. Hosea began his ministry sometime during the reign of Jeroboam II, which was one of the darkest periods in Israel’s history.

Hosea prophesied to the Northern Kingdom of Israel until it fell, and then he continued his ministry in Judah.

2. During Hosea’s ministry, the Northern Kingdom of Israel (often called ‘Ephraim’) was characterized by military expansion and moral decline.

Four of Israel’s last six rulers were assassinated. The other two usurped the throne through assassination.

THEME

1. The theme of the book is God’s steadfast love for His people despite their continual unfaithfulness. This is represented in Hosea’s marriage to an unfaithful woman.

Hosea 1:2

“The Lord said to him, ‘Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord.’”

When his wife’s wanton ways led her to slavery, Hosea redeemed her as a type of God’s redeeming love for His people. (Hosea 3:1-5)

JOEL – A FORESHADOW OF COMING JUDGMENT

BACKGROUND

1. Joel’s message is set against the background of three calamities: locusts, drought, and famine.

“What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have left other locusts have eaten. Despair, you farmers, wail, you vine growers; grieve for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field is destroyed. Even the wild animals pant for you; the streams of water have dried up and fire has devoured the open pastures.” (Joel 1:4, 11, 20)

2. Joel uses the immediate calamities to point to a coming “Day of the Lord” when a literal army of Gentiles will attack Jerusalem.

Joel prophesied to the leaders to call the people to repentance in order to stop the current judgment and avert the future judgment.

THEME

1. The dominant theme in Joel is the “Day of the Lord.”

The “Day of the Lord” is also referred to in Isaiah 13:6; Ezekiel 30:3; Amos 5:18; and Zephaniah 1:14, 15.

The phrase “Day of the Lord” may refer to current events, future events, and ultimate events– all at the same time. For example, the “Day of the Lord” in Joel refers to the plague of locusts (current event), the future invasion of Gentile armies (future event), and the conclusion of God’s purposes in the world (ultimate event).

AMOS – THE PROPHET AGAINST SOCIAL INJUSTICE

BACKGROUND

1. Amos was an agrarian businessman and not a professional minister.

“I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said, ‘Go, prophesy to My people.’”

(Amos 7:14, 15)

THEME

1. Amos is best known for his sermons against social injustice.

This is what the Lord says: “For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed.” (Amos 2:6, 7 NASB)

Amos is the prototypical social reformer. He was the first of many prophets throughout Scripture and history that would speak against injustice and oppression.

Israel’s prosperity had lead to oppression of the poor. (Amos 4:1)

Amos condemned injustice and called Israel to repentance. (Amos 5:24)

OBADIAH – THE PROPHET AGAINST THE EDMITES

BACKGROUND

No information is given about Obadiah, the author of the shortest book in the Old Testament.

1. The single purpose of Obadiah was to pronounce judgment upon Edom for their participation in the destruction of Jerusalem.

The Edomites (sometimes referred to as Mt. Seir) were the descendants of Jacob’s brother Esau. Israel had constant trouble throughout her history with the Edomites.

“The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, ‘Who can bring me down to the ground?’ Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,” declares the Lord.” (Obadiah 1:3, 4)

Edom is judged more times in the Old Testament than any other nation.

JONAH – THE DISOBEDIENT PROPHET

BACKGROUND

Jonah preached to the Assyrians, but wrote to Israel. Like the Assyrians, they could expect judgment if they did not repent – and blessing if they did.

1. Jonah was called to prophesy against Nineveh. Frightened that they would repent and that God would then relent from judgment, Jonah fled to Tarshish.

Jonah's aversion of the Assyrians was well grounded. They were known for their fierce barbarity: skinning their enemies alive or impaling them on sharp poles and leaving them to rot in the desert sun.

The historicity of Jonah has been challenged since the 18th century. Jesus declared the authenticity of the events. (Matthew 12:40, 41)

PURPOSE

1. The book was written to provoke Israel to repent through an example of God's mercy to a pagan nation without a covenant.

It was also written to remind the nation of their missionary calling to the world. God demonstrated His love for the world by bringing repentance to a nation through the preaching of a man who did not care for them and did not even want to be there!

MICAH – THE MESSIANIC PROPHET

BACKGROUND

1. Micah is best known for his prophecy concerning the Messiah.

Micah 5:2

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for Me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

THEME

1. Micah’s message of judgement is directed against idolatry and social injustice. His message of judgment is seasoned with hopeful references to a “remnant” that will return.

“I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people.” (Micah 2:12)

NAHUM – GOD’S CONSOLATION

BACKGROUND

Nahum’s name means “consolation,” appropriate for the prophet sent to bring consolation to Judah.

The book of Nahum is about the destruction of the Assyrians. The Assyrians had their chance to repent under the preaching of Jonah over one hundred years prior.

Judgment was now inevitable (Nahum 3:19a).

1. Nahum was written to encourage an under sieged Judah that their time of fear and anxiety concerning Assyria was over.

“Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, and fulfill your vows. No more will the wicked invade you; they will be completely destroyed.” (Nahum 1:15)

Nahum’s prophecy is a vivid lyric poem. “His language is strong and brilliant; his rhythm rumbles and rolls, leaps and flashes, like the horsemen and chariots he describes.”¹

THEME

1. The theme of Nahum is that there is justice in this world. Oppression does not go on forever. A sovereign God rules in heaven and on earth.

¹ G.A. Smith, Quoted in The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.

HABAKKUK – THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH

BACKGROUND

1. Habakkuk was a prophet connected with the temple in a liturgical singing role.

Habakkuk's writing is not a prophecy to Judah but a prayer to God (3:19).

Habakkuk asks two questions. His first is: Why does God not stop the sin that is rampant in the nation? (1:2, 3) God replies by telling him that Babylon is coming to execute judgment against unrighteousness! (1:5, 6)

Habakkuk's second question is: Why would God allow a wicked nation to destroy His people? God replies by telling him He will also judge Babylon! (2:8)

THEME

1. The theme of Habakkuk is the triumph of faith.

Habakkuk begins in perplexity and progresses to certainty.

Habakkuk 2:4

"...the righteous will live by his faith."

Habakkuk demonstrates the triumph of faith in his own spiritual journey. He first brings his confusion to God in honest prayer (1:2). He then takes the time to meditate and listen to God (2:1). He stays open to correction (2:1b). He reflects on God's faithfulness in history (3:2). He gives praise to God in the middle of very difficult circumstances. (Habakkuk 3:17-19)

ZEPHANIAH – THE DAY OF THE LORD

BACKGROUND

Zephaniah's great-great grandfather was King Hezekiah – making him nobility and a distant relation of the current king, Josiah.

1. Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah.

THEMES

1. The “Day of the Lord” is referred to more in this book than in any other (1:7, 14; 2:3).
2. Zephaniah’s vision is not exclusive to Israel. The Lord is sovereign over all the earth.

Zephaniah 2:11

“The Lord will destroy all the gods of the land. The nations on every shore will worship Him, everyone in its own land.”

HAGGAI – THE FIRST POST-EXILIC PROPHET

BACKGROUND

Haggai is the first of the three post-exilic prophets. Zechariah and Malachi were the other two. Almost 50,000 Jews had returned to Israel in 538 BC. They rebuilt the altar and resumed the sacrifices (536 BC), but discontinued the temple construction after a few months. Nothing was done for sixteen years until the prophet Haggai began to speak.

1. The book of Haggai consists of four separate sermons given during a four-month period in the year 520 BC.

Sermon # 1: The prophet reproved the people for tending to their own homes and neglecting God’s house. (Haggai 1:2-5)

Within twenty-four days, the people begin to rebuild the temple!

Sermon # 2: The prophet encouraged the people who thought things would never be like the glory days. (Haggai 2:3, 6-9)

Sermon # 3: The prophet challenged the people to mark the day they put God’s kingdom first. (Haggai 2:18, 19)

Sermon # 4: The prophet stirred the people with a message for both then and the future. (Haggai 2:21-23)

ZECHARIAH – THE LORD REMEMBERS

BACKGROUND

The name Zechariah means “the Lord remembers” – an appropriate name for a people who feel forgotten. Zechariah is often called the “prophet of hope.”

1. Zechariah was born in Babylon and was among the first group that returned to Palestine under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua.

Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai. He was a prophet and a priest.

2. Zechariah is filled with messianic prophecies.

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (9:9) “They will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born.” (12:10) “Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered.” (13:7)

MALACHI – THE LAST WORD

BACKGROUND

1. Malachi ministered during Nehemiah’s governorship.

The one hundred plus years since the remnant had returned to the land was marked by cycles of enthusiasm and revival, and then declension and backsliding.

2. He reproved the people for some of the same sins they were guilty of during the ministry of Zerubbabel and Ezra.

Malachi is unique among the prophets in his use of the debating style of question and answer. First, he makes a statement, and then he responds with an imagined objection raised in the form of a question. Finally, he refutes their objection (2:17).

THEME

1. Malachi attempts to provoke the people to righteousness and a return to the covenant of God with their whole heart.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do Amos and Nahum practically challenge you to care about injustice? What will you do to make a difference?
2. Where do Jonah's bad attitudes ("*They won't change,*" "*They don't deserve another chance,*" etc.) show up in your view towards unbelievers?
3. What is the most important insight that God showed you from the study of the Old Testament? How will you practically implement it in your life?

HOMEWORK

Select one of the following:

1. Read the first six chapters of Daniel looking for the theme of God's sovereignty over the nations.
2. Pick any of the Minor Prophets and read the entire book.