

introduction

THE MINOR PROPHETS AND THEIR GREAT MESSAGE

HOSEA • JOEL • AMOS • OBADIAH • JONAH • MICAH • NAHUM
HABAKKUK • ZEPHANIAH • HAGGAI • ZECHARIAH • MALACHI

As we study the minor prophets, we are not just looking at ancient times and old sermons. We're going to hear the revelation of God—who He is, what He does, how He works—so that we have a foundation for our hope. Hope is not *wishful thinking*; hope is *confidence built on evidence*. The confidence needed for our lives today can only be found in the evidence of what the Bible tells us about who God is, what God is like, what God does, and how we can know Him.

Every one needs hope in a world that is fallen, fractured, faltering, and at times, feels as if it is absolutely failing.

Hope is the oxygen of the soul. Just as the body has to have the next breath to live, the soul needs hope, especially in regard to a future that is tethered to the times in which we live.

There is a collection of books found in the Bible that has both a personal and cultural relevance for us today—in addition to a spiritual message. These books are called the Minor Prophets.

A pastor once stood in front of his congregation, and as he began to teach on this subject, he said, "Would you turn to the white pages in your Bible?"—meaning the pages had no markings due to lack of attention.

Apart from possibly the Old Testament book of Leviticus, some of the most unknown, strange and bizarre writings in the Bible are found in the books of the minor prophets.

Yet, the minor prophets had a distinctive message related to the conflict and turbulence of their times, and they address questions many of us are asking today. If I had to pick three strands of questions that braid together related to our present culture—certainly spiritually—it would be these: What does God have to say? How does God see our world? What is God's Word and God's perspective on life as we know it?

Frankly, as I considered teaching the minor prophets, I prayed, "Lord, I'd really like to have something more positive, more hope-filled, more encouraging to be able to tell people."

"Nothing less than a whole Bible
can make a whole Christian"

—A.W. Tozer

"The Minor Prophets give us a clear grasp of how God's chosen servants reacted to the massive political, social and religious changes that swept through Israel and Judea during their lifetimes. We see the devastating effects of corruption eating away the moral fiber of a nation and we are given breathtaking glimpses of God's sovereignty, His hatred of sin and His amazing love. Carefully read and wisely understood, they act as powerful stabilizers for God's people today as they face the twenty-first century's changes and challenges."

—Dr. John Blanchard

No matter how often I want to put "nice" on everything, I must remember I am a steward of the Word of God. I can't just pick and choose comfortable passages found in the Bible and neglect what is uncomfortable. I have a responsibility and a charge to teach the whole counsel of God with faithfulness, honesty and accuracy, as best I can.

And so, it is with conviction that I examine the words of the minor prophets with you in this study entitled *Prophets, Politics and Prayer: Exchanging Doom for Everlasting Hope*.

David H. McKinley



big picture OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

GENESIS

- Starting point of the Bible
- Introduction of God's sovereign creation

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).



HISTORY

These books represent a historical record crossing the entirety of the Old Testament.

POETRY

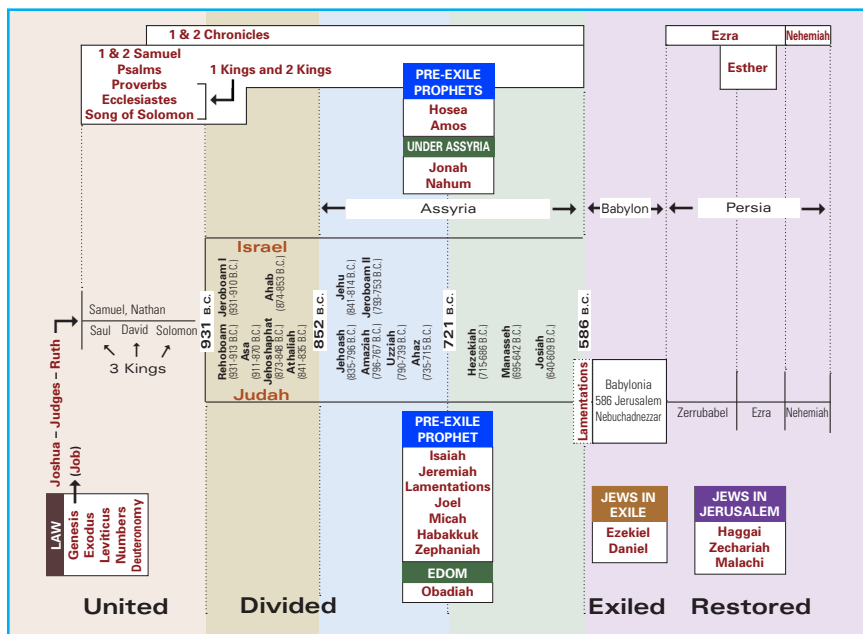
These are very personal books providing us incredible glimpses into human experience, emotion, worship and celebration.

MINOR PROPHETS

- Final 12 books in the Old Testament
- Titled "Minor" because of their size and length, not their significance
- Average, ordinary people
- They fulfill their mission and message, but little is known about them personally
- Set up the arrival of Christ
- These books reflect great diversity of time, personality, setting, experience and background, yet each speaks with unity concerning the nature of God and the plan of God for His people

God allows us to see the intentionality and the detail with which He worked in a particular, covenant people called, Israel. This has defined His redemptive work throughout time.

The historical framework of the minor prophets transposes into the time line of history.



United

Israel, the people of God, had three great kings: Saul, David and Solomon. A large portion of Kings and Chronicles tells us about their lives and how Israel flourished during their reigns. The descendants of Abraham came in to claim the Promise Land, the holy land. This land surrounded the shore of the Mediterranean and ultimately, the city of Jerusalem—the land of Judea. We know it as Israel, and it is the most disputed land in our world today.

The very fact that Israel exists today is a major part of what we read in Scripture. During the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon, there was the gathering of people, the establishment of the kingdom, the building of the capital city and ultimately, the building of the temple in Jerusalem.

Solomon, who was a wise man, became a weak, disturbed and distracted king who indulged himself in many ways at the end of his reign.

Divided

In 931 B.C., there was a split within the kingdom and Solomon's two sons succeeded him. Jeroboam ruled over the northern kingdom of Israel (10 tribes) and Rehoboam ruled over the southern kingdom of Judah (two tribes).

Politically speaking, they had "red" and "blue" states. They didn't actually have a civil war, but they had a drastically divided nation, and each part of their nation had a different vision for its future.

The people of Judah believed they needed to maintain the system of the Temple, and everyone needed to go to Jerusalem to worship.

However, Israel established its own religious practices in another city. Israel and Judah also made different political alliances with different nations, and all of this created conflict that unfolded throughout history. Please understand, this is not solely an Old Testament, religious history; it is world history.

Exiled

The first of the great people groups to have world domination were the Assyrians. In 721 B.C., the Assyrians attacked the northern kingdom of Israel and took them captive. The 10 tribes to the north were scattered and have never fully been identified to this day.

In 586 B.C., the southern kingdom fell under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians.

At this point, you may be asking, “Why have a crash course in Jewish history?”

The prophets were interwoven into all aspects of this period of history. There were prophets to the northern kingdom; there were prophets to the southern kingdom. There were prophets within the Promise Land; there were prophets in exile. And there were prophets amid those who would regather in the land.

“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21 ESV).

Just as the Spirit of God was moving and working in the turbulence, conflicts and tensions in Israel and Judah, God is working in our lives today. He has given us His written Word as a whole and He is moving and working in our lives individually and in this generation collectively to ultimately fulfill His plan and His purpose.

“The two testaments are two lips by which God has spoken to us.” —Thomas Watson

God speaks to us through the Old and New Testaments, and we need to know both in order to understand the work of God.

One other statement I want to add is that Jesus referenced many of these prophets during His earthly ministry.

While some contemporaries disrespected and dismissed the prophets, Jesus stood with them. Let’s be careful to recognize that Jesus used and utilized the messages of these prophets as a part of His earthly ministry.

In fact, prophets foretold future events—the beginning of things yet to come. It was Micah, one of the minor prophets, who foretold the location of the coming of Christ in the city of Bethlehem 700 years before His birth.

To some, the word, *prophet*, may not only be associated with foretelling, but with words like *mystical, bizarre, weird*. While

there are certainly prophesies given from the prophets, much of their message and ministry was actually forth telling—proclaiming, declaring, instructing, sounding the alarm, pointing to truth, recognizing consequence, offering hope.

“The words the prophet utters are not offered as souvenirs. His speech to the people is not a reminiscence, a report, hearsay. The prophet not only conveys; he reveals. He almost does unto others what God does unto him. In speaking, the prophet reveals God. This is the marvel of a prophet’s work: in his words the invisible God becomes audible. He does not prove or argue. The thought he has to convey is more than language can contain. Divine power bursts in the words. The authority of the prophet is in the Presence his words reveal.”

—Rabbi Abraham Heschel

In conclusion, let’s look at five big concepts about God, five big messages you will see again and again, and five things that will give you an anchor for your soul and for your HOPE.

1. God Rules

You can affix your hope to the truth that God rules.

You are not living in a world of random chaos. Yes, there is chaos in a world where sin brings its ravaging, damaging reality, but at the end of the day, God rules. The sovereignty of God is an undeniable reality. You see this in

the large framework of history and from the prophets. The psalmist said it this way:

“The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all” (Psalm 103:19).

2. God Judges

You cannot read the prophets without coming face-to-face with the judgment of God. Yes, there are messages of doom within the words of the prophets, but their messages were not without hope. The prophets spoke with clarity as they addressed the present realities of their day, but the judgment of God had to do with His character. God is a moral being and to this end, His judgment is based on who He is and who we are.

This reality can be offensive in a society that is both immoral and amoral. Are you finding the world in which you live rejecting any form of moral standard? Today, it seems some form of social issue or political correctness is embraced and used as a substitute for any clear, moral authority.

“Reading the prophets can be an unsettling experience. Here we see God’s utter, absolute fury against sin. The graphic accounts of what God is going to do to His own faithless, immoral and complacent people constitute some of the scariest words in all literature.”

—Gene Edward Veith

3. God Loves

At the same time, God loves. The love of God is a river that cuts through the darkness, doom and devastation found in the message of the prophets. Instead of feeling smothered through the dark foreboding of helplessness and hopelessness, take heart! There is the truth that God's love.

"Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love" (Joel 2:13 ESV).

A common criticism often heard about the Bible is this: the God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath and the God of the New Testament is a God of love. But did you know there are actually more references to the love of God in the Old Testament than there are in the New Testament?

"The move from the Old Testament to the New Testament is not a move from a wrathful God to a loving God. Rather the New Testament ratchets up both themes." —D.A. Carson

4. God Appeals

Throughout the words of the prophets, we find the appeal of God to His people. If God so desired, He could just obliterate sinful people with His authority. And yet, lovingly and tenderly God appeals and says, return, return, return, come to Me.

"Come, let us return to the LORD; for He has torn us, that He may heal us; He has struck us down, and He will bind us up... For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:1, 6 ESV).

If you are distant from God today, His desire is not that you would rebel and be destroyed, but that you would return to Him.

5. God Sends

God is a "sending God." He sent the prophets to His people as a part of His love in order to provide diagnosis, direction and guidance. Every prophet bore the message of a sending God who is going to ultimately send the answer, the resolution, the hope and the redemption—Jesus Christ!

You cannot separate the prophets into a category of old historic, prophetic people. They are a part of the message concerning the coming Christ and the message of God to us today. The Bible says it this way:

"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:1-3 ESV).

Jesus came to earth to die for sin. He came here to take away judgment. He came here to express love. He came here to give us the hope of an ultimate rule and reign that would correct all of the injustices of this world. He was sent here to redeem and to reclaim. And God now sends us forth with the message of Jesus Christ that we would declare the message of hope in a world that is helpless, heartless, and so often hopeless.

There is much to learn through the minor prophets. God has given you a hope and a future. Ultimately, at the conclusion of each book study, my prayer is that you would ask,
"How should I then live?"



Father, how I pray these words will be inspiration and hope for our hearts. I pray, Lord, that You would help us to not be unfamiliar with these prophetic voices, but afresh and anew, we would embrace the hope, encouragement and help they provide. Father, never have we had a greater need for guidance because of the confusion and chaos of our day. How I pray that You will move and work in our hearts and our church in these days that we may glorify Jesus in whose name we stand and we pray and we minister, Amen.

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