

The

“Minor”

*Prophets and
Their Message*

To

*Our World
Today*

Introduction

The distinction between “major” and “minor” prophets is only a technical one. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel are called “Major prophets” because the sheer bulk of their written prophecy was of major proportions. The twelve prophets we will be studying are called “Minor Prophets” because sum total of their written prophecy was smaller in comparison to that of the Major Prophets. In no way were the Minor Prophets themselves, or their messages, of lesser importance or inferior to the Major Prophets. The Minor Prophets wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; they wrote by the authority of the One True God; the reliability of their message was just as great as that of the Major Prophets. Indeed, the Minor Prophets had a message which would point to eternal life. As Paul presents the doctrine of justification by faith in his letter to the Romans, he shows that this is not a new doctrine, but can be found already in the prophets. In Romans 1:17 Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4, when he says, “It is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’” Peter in Acts 15:15,16 quotes the minor prophet Amos. And we read in Matt. 2 that the wise men from the East had determined to seek out the Christ Child in Bethlehem because of the very explicit directions which they found in Micah 5:2. Thus, the Minor Prophets are as much a part of God’s inspired Word as any other part of the Old Testament.

For this reason, these writings provide us with a very reliable source for the history of the people of Israel from the time of Amos to the time of Malachi. And since the Minor Prophets are an integral part of Holy Scripture they are also profitable to us for “doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Truly, they give us a faithful picture of man’s persistent abounding in sin, and God’s persisting in giving sinners His undeserved grace and mercy.

In addition, we must remember that the prophets were not merely soothsayers, or diviners, or prognosticators. Prophecy involved more than just the dictionary definition, “prediction of the future”. The prophets were spokesmen of a living God. They were primarily “preachers” in the highest sense of the word. Their repeated references to the future grew out of the existing conditions around them. God gave them the message to preach in answer to the often terrible spiritual climate in Israel, and often it was a message which spoke in reference to the future judgment of the LORD. Of course, they made predictions, but these were only incidental to their message.

Background

Central to our discussion of the work of the Minor Prophets will be the role of the Kings of Israel. God had referred to the matter of kingship already to Abraham when he promised a son to Sarah. “Kings of people shall be of her” (Gen. 17:16). Jacob had implied much the same in his blessing of Judah (Gen. 49:8). The people of Israel weren’t content though to wait God’s time on the matter, but prematurely demanded a king. “God give us a king to judge us,” (First Samuel 8:6) the elders of Israel demanded of Samuel at Ramah. And God granted their request. Saul was made king and ruled for 40 years until his disobedience disqualified him as King.

David succeeded Saul, but for 72 years there was war between the houses of David and Saul, until David finally succeeded in uniting the two kingdoms again. After that, the reign of Solomon was a time of peace and prosperity. But after 120 years of fairly good leadership under the first three kings, the kingdom was divided between Jeroboam I and Rehoboam. That division marked the breakdown of effective political and moral leadership on the part of the monarchy.

The northern kingdom very quickly disintegrated, morally and politically. Jeroboam instituted the policy of estranging the northern tribes completely from Judah and the temple worship by setting up two golden calves at Bethel and Dan. The stage was set for the idolatrous worship practices called “the sin of Jeroboam.” It wasn’t long before this quickly degenerated into worship of Baal and Ashtoreth. God’s judgment had to come. For the Northern Tribes this judgment would come in the form of Deportation throughout the Assyrian Empire. This was the setting into which God sent His prophets like Amos and Hosea.

On the next pages is a timeline of when the Minor Prophets were active. We will note that the order in which these Books occur in the Bible is not a chronological one. The fact is that the Books of the Minor Prophets were listed in various orders since the completion of the last Book, that of Malachi. Some scholars have suggested they were grouped according to subject or audience, but that is difficult to establish. The order in our English Bibles dates back to the time of Saint Augustine who was also the first to use the term “Minor Prophets” to describe these Books of the Bible. For this class we will follow the order as given in our modern Bibles.

Timeline

Below is an approximate timeline covering the period of activity of the Minor Prophets. Historical events and various Jewish rulers along with some of the more notable pagan kings are included to fill out the chronology. All dates are BC – before Christ. [Minor Prophets in **bold**.]

931 – Division of Israel into the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah under Rehoboam

840 – **Obadiah**, Prophet of Judah against Edom

835-796 – Joash, (aka Jehoash) King of Judah

835 – **Joel**, Prophet of Judah

[814 – Founding of Carthage]

793-753 – Jeroboam II, King of Israel

791-740 – Uzziah (aka Azariah), King of Judah

780-750 – **Jonah**, Prophet of Israel to Nineveh

765-750 – **Amos**, Prophet of Judah to Israel

[753 – Founding of Rome]

755-715 – **Hosea**, Prophet of Israel

740-690 – **Micah**, Prophet of Judah

740-685 – Isaiah, Prophet of Israel

728-686 – Hezekiah, King of Judah

722 – to Northern Kingdom of Israel Conquered and the people exiled by Assyrians throughout their territories (aka The “Lost Tribes” of Israel)

640-609 – Josiah, King of Judah enacts spiritual reforms

635-622 – **Zephaniah**, Prophet of Judah

[624 – Birth of Siddhartha Gautama, “the Buddha”]

627-580 – Jeremiah, Prophet of Judah

620-604 – **Habakkuk**, Prophet of Judah

663-612 – **Nahum**, Prophet against Nineveh

612 – The Babylonians Conquer and Destroy Nineveh

605 – Babylon Invades Judah, captures Jerusalem, and begins the exile of Daniel and many other prominent Jews

597 – Second Invasion by the Babylonians, Ezekiel and more of the other prominent Jews are exiled to Babylon

586 – Final destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Babylonians, exile of most of the remaining Jewish population to Babylon

[551 - Birth of Kong Qiu, "Confucius"]

539 – to Cyrus II (aka Cyrus the Great) Captures Babylon Empire

538 – First Return of exiled Jews to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel

520-518 – **Zechariah**, Prophet to the returned exiles in Judah

520 – **Haggai**, Prophet to returned exiles in Judah

516 – Rebuilding of the Temple Completed

[490 – Battle of Marathon; 480 – Battle of Thermopylae]

478 – Esther and Mordecai foil a plot to exterminate all Jews everywhere in the Persian Empire (the Jewish festival of Purim – aka "Lots" – is instituted)

[470 – Birth of Socrates]

458 – Ezra and other exiles return to Jerusalem

450-420 – **Malachi**, Prophet to returned exiles in Judah

[447 – Parthenon begun]

440 – Nehemiah Returns to Jerusalem, Begins Rebuilding the Walls

400 – Jewish Old Testament assembled by Ezra

Hosea

The corruption of the northern Kingdom of Israel had now reached an advanced stage. Society was disintegrating. Jehovah had actually been incorporated into Baal worship. The people desired fertility for their fields and herds, and so they began the practice of fertility cults and sacred prostitution. Ephods and teraphim were used for purposes of divination (Hosea 3:4). Soothsayers and practices of wizardry developed (Second Kings 17:17). The voice of Hosea came with warning against the threatening disaster which God would send. But the message of Hosea was not without hope. Hosea's own family experience provided a wonderful object lesson for Israel. Hosea was commanded by God to marry a harlot named Gomer. Gomer was symbolic of the people of Israel. Not only was she unfaithful to Hosea before the marriage, she was unfaithful during as well. She left home and became a temple prostitute at the shrine of Baal and Ashtoreth. Still, the Lord directed Hosea to go and reclaim her. God's message through the prophet Hosea was that there was still hope for unfaithful people of Israel. They were not yet beyond the reach of God's covenant of mercy. Like Gomer they had gone after other lovers and bowed the knee to other gods. They were guilty of ingratitude and apostasy. But the divine husband was seeking to reclaim them. The prophet Hosea preached a message of sin and grace, a call to repentance and the promise of mercy.

Study Questions

Chapter One

- 1.) Are we really supposed to believe that this holy man of God actually married a harlot? Why?
- 2.) Why would this have been especially difficult for Hosea?
- 3.) What do their children symbolize?

Chapter Two

- 1.) What aspects of God's judgment are especially appropriate for the sin of Baal worship?
- 2.) What will be the results of the Lord's treatment?

Chapter Three

- 1.) What symbolic action is Hosea asked to perform?
- 2.) Where do we see God's love in this chapter?

Chapter Four

- 1.) What warnings can we see here for ministers of God's Word?
- 2.) To what is the whirlwind a reference?

Chapter Five

- 1.) What two groups of leaders are condemned here?
- 2.) Of what specific sins does God accuse them?

Chapter Six

1.) What does the LORD look for in His people?

2.) How does God describe the history of Israel here?

Chapter Seven

1.) What are the metaphors in –

v.3-7:

v.8:

v.9:

v.11

v.16:

Chapter Eight

1.) What evidence do we see in this chapter of “sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind?”

2.) What is meant by the “return to Egypt?”

Chapter Nine

1.) Under what conditions will the people live in captivity?

2.) Is Hosea himself being vengeful here? Why or why not?

Chapter Ten

- 1.) How did Israel use its national prosperity?
- 2.) What was the result?

Chapter Eleven

- 1.) How does God feel about having to judge Israel?
- 2.) What future results does the Lord hope to see?

Chapter Twelve

- 1.) Why does God mention Jacob here?
- 2.) What special evidence of the Lord's mercy has Israel spurned?

Chapter Thirteen

- 1.) What promise can we see for God's people in v.14?

Chapter Fourteen

- 1.) What remedy for sin does God point to here?
- 2.) How does this compare with the remedies for sin offered in the religious world of today?

