

SUMMER BIBLE STUDY
MINOR PROPHETS



Summer
Reading Challenge
2017

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week 1

Behind the Text: The Purpose of Prophets



God's people have always needed truth tellers. God's people have always needed stern calls to repentance. God's people have always needed reminders of God's faithfulness to the very end of the age. In the Old Testament, God provided prophets to meet these needs. Prophets ensured truth was spoken to the powerful, repentance was held up as the only viable option in the face of sin, and God's promises were proclaimed in days of greatest distress. One could summarize the work of prophets in three words: reality, grief, and hope.

This summer we will study a small section of the Old Testament known as the Minor Prophets, also known as the Twelve Prophets. Despite beginning as separate books, they were traditionally sewn together into one scroll. The unity of the scroll from which ancient rabbis taught these books points to their unified message of God's steadfast faithfulness and unyielding determination to rescue His people from the utter destruction that lies in wait inside and outside their community. Today we see their unity also points us to God's ultimate rescue plan, the incarnation of God Himself in Jesus Christ the Messiah about whom "The Twelve" so clearly speak.

This Summer Reading Challenge will take us on a journey exploring the reality, grief, and hope about which the Twelve Prophets speak. As we read God's word together as a family of Faith, our prayer is that our journey together will lead us toward our ultimate hope: God, made known in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

READING PLAN: ISAIAH 1–12

READING 1: Isaiah 1:1–31

QUESTION(S): What are some of the sins of Israel that Isaiah is calling out? Can you see your own sin in any of the descriptions that Isaiah provides in this chapter? What does God desire for Israel in verses 16 and 17? How do you see yourself living these things out?

READING 2: Isaiah 2:1–5:30

QUESTION(S): In these chapters, Isaiah is describing the “day of the LORD” which signifies God’s coming judgment. What are some of the ways in which God will judge his people? What components of the day of the Lord jumped out to you? Can you find any signs of repentance and humility in these chapters? Any signs of hope? Isaiah sings a song in chapter 5 about a vineyard that is producing wild grapes (bad fruit). What are some of the wild grapes that Isaiah sings about in this song?

READING 3: Isaiah 6:1–8:22

QUESTION(S): How does God want to use Isaiah to influence the people? How is his mission similar to the mission that Jesus gave his disciples and us (see Matthew 28:16–20)? What does the coming Immanuel teach us about God’s character, especially as it relates to how He chose to save His people?

READING 4: Isaiah 9:1–11:16

QUESTION(S): Where do you see God’s promise of mercy and salvation in these chapters? What prophecies about Jesus do you see in chapter 11?

READING 5: Isaiah 12:1–12:6

QUESTION(S): Read chapter 12 out loud three times (just 6 verses). How do these words of Scripture move you? Select 2 or 3 of these verses to memorize. How many characteristics of God are celebrated and acknowledged in these verses?

week 2

Behind the Text: Amos



Prophetic Period: 8th Century B.C.
The Issue Facing God's People: Excess
The Prophetic Task: Reality

Purpose, occasion and background: After about 780–745 B.C., the Assyrian Empire was unable to continue the pressure it had put on the nations of the Canaanite coast during the previous century. At this same time, both Judah and Israel were blessed with fairly stable governments. As a result of these two factors, the two nations (especially Israel) were experiencing a time of wealth and prosperity. However, what the Israelites saw as the beginning of a new “Golden Age” was really the end for them. It was Amos’s unhappy task to tell them of God’s coming judgment. Within just a few years Israel would no longer exist as a nation. They would continue to exist as a scattered people only by God’s unmerited grace (9:11–15). “The day of the LORD,” far from being a day of blessing, was going to be a day of darkness. By 722 B.C. Assyria would regain its strength, and the Israelites would be conquered and exiled.

READING PLAN: AMOS

READING 1: Amos 1:1–2:16

QUESTION(S): In Amos’ time (early 8th century BC), both Judah and Israel were enjoying prosperity and security. Amos prophesied judgment on the surrounding enemy nations in 1:1–2:3, but then he went on to denounce the actions of the nations of Israel and Judah in 2:4–2:16. How do you respond when someone points out something you are doing wrong?

READING 2: Amos 3:1–4:13

QUESTION(S): God called on the Israelites but they did not respond (4:9). How can we make sure that we are not missing what God is telling us?

READING 3: Amos 5:1–27

QUESTION(S): Amos calls for justice to roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (5:24). Is there an area in your life where you might find yourself on the wrong side of God's justice and righteousness? What would you need to do in order to stop and turn to Jesus right now?

READING 4: Amos 6:1–7:17

QUESTION(S): In 6:1 both Judah (Zion) and Israel (Samaria) are condemned for living indulgently (6:4), and for not grieving over the sin of their brothers (6:6). Is there anything in our nation that moves you to mourn?

READING 5: Amos 8:1–9:15

QUESTION(S): In 8:11 God warns of a famine, not of bread, but of hearing the words of the Lord. Do you long for the words of the Lord like food? How do you feed yourself? How can you expose those in your family to God's word?

week 3

Behind the Text: Hosea



Prophetic Period: 8th Century B.C.
The Issue Facing God's People: Excess
The Prophetic Task: Reality

Purpose, occasion and background: Israel is the Lord's bride, but Israel has instead joined itself to Baal, the false god worshiped in Syria-Palestine. Worshiping Baal violates the first of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:3). It is also a betrayal of God's intimate union with his people. Therefore Hosea describes it as spiritual adultery, an offense against the marriage between the Lord and Israel. He compares Israel's spiritual unfaithfulness to the ingratitude of a wayward wife. Such unfaithfulness justifies the Lord's coming judgment, but punishment is not ultimately what the Lord wants for His people. He desires that they leave their sin. He wants them to return to the One who first loved them and who can provide what is best for them.

READING PLAN: HOSEA

READING 1: Hosea 1:1-3:5

QUESTION(S): Look at 1:2-3. Are you shocked that God told Hosea to take "a wife of whoredom?" What was this marriage supposed to communicate about the character of God's people at that time? Look at 2:19-20. What do we learn about God's character from these verses?

READING 2: Hosea 4:1–5:15

QUESTION(S): Look at 4:4–6. What do these verses teach us about the importance of healthy spiritual leadership? Now read 4:12. While we don't practice idolatry like this today, how are we guilty of seeking truth and identity in places other than God and His Word?

READING 3: Hosea 6:1–8:14

QUESTION(S): Look at 6:6. Why does God desire “steadfast love” and “knowledge of God” rather than “sacrifices” and “burnt offerings?” Why did the people of Israel fail to live out this steadfast love that God desires? What does this steadfast love look like in our lives today (see Proverbs 21:3 and Matthew 9:13)?

READING 4: Hosea 9:1–11:11

QUESTION(S): Hosea chapters 9 and 10 are full of harsh “judgment” language. How is chapter 11 different? Look at 11:1, 8–9. What do these verses tell us about God's heart towards His people even when we rebel against Him (see Romans 5:6–8 and 2 Timothy 2:13)?

READING 5: Hosea 11:12–14:9

QUESTION(S): Look at 13:4–6. Why did the nation of Israel forget God? Are we in danger of doing the same today? Now read 14:1. Where do you need to “return to the LORD your God” and experience His grace through His Son, Jesus Christ (see 1 John 1:9)? Ask a friend to pray for you (and you for them) that you would remember the Lord in the week to come.

week 4

Behind the Text: Micah



Prophetic Period: 8th Century B.C.
The Issue Facing God's People: Excess
The Prophetic Task: Reality

Purpose, occasion and background: Micah writes to bring God's "lawsuit" against his people (3:8). He indicts Samaria and Jerusalem for their sins (1:2-7). Both Assyria (5:5-6) and Babylon (4:10) stand ready to carry out God's judgment. The reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, along with the increasing threat of Assyria, provide the broad background for Micah. Micah lists specific sins of both the northern and southern kingdoms. These sins include idolatry (1:7 ; 5:12-14); the seizure of property (2:2, 9); the failure of civil leadership (3:1-3, 9-10; 7:3), religious leadership (3:11), and prophetic leadership (3:5-7, 11); offering sacrifice without truly repenting (6:6-7); and corrupt business practices and violence (6:10-12). Micah writes to bring God's "lawsuit" against his people (3:8). He indicts Samaria and Jerusalem for their sins (1:2-7). Both Assyria (5:5-6) and Babylon (4:10) stand ready to carry out God's judgment. The reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, along with the increasing threat of Assyria, provide the broad background for Micah.

READING PLAN: MICAH

READING 1: Micah 1:1-2:13

QUESTION(S): The first thing Micah does in his prophecy is call his listeners to "pay attention" and "let the LORD GOD be a witness against" them (1:2). Where might God be asking you to "pay attention" in these first two chapters? Is there something small or large in your life you need to "let the LORD GOD be a witness against?"

READING 2: Micah 3:1–3:12

QUESTION(S): Micah is highly graphic in speaking out against false prophets who are misleading God's people (3:1–5). To what voices do you listen? Make a list of things you hear or sources from our culture that may be misleading you. Allow this time to be a time of listening to God to help bring these voices to light.

READING 3: Micah 4:1–4:13

QUESTION(S): Spend time praying for our church, that it would be “a house of the LORD...established as the highest of the mountains...lifted up above the hills...and peoples shall flow to it” (4:1).

READING 4: Micah 5:1–15

QUESTION(S): Look for the portions of Micah's prophecy in chapter 5 that are fulfilled in Jesus Christ (5:1–5, 5:7–9). What has God provided in the face of the judgment and punishment that is woven throughout Micah? What does this mean for you?

READING 5: Micah 6:1–7:20

QUESTION(S): Is there anything you have been asking God and continue to wait for an answer? Where does Micah guide us to look (7:7)? What hope does Micah offer you in chapters 6 and 7 (6:8, 7:7, 7:14–20)?

week 5

Behind the Text: Habakkuk



Prophetic Period: Exilic
The Issue Facing God's People: Unfaithfulness
The Prophetic Task: Grief

Purpose, occasion and background: The first two chapters are organized around Habakkuk's questions and the Lord's replies. Habakkuk saw Judah's rapid moral and spiritual decline, and this deeply troubled him. Yet God's response puzzled him even more. How could a good and just God use a more wicked nation (Babylon) to punish a less wicked one (Judah)? God makes it clear that both nations are to be judged and appropriately punished for their sin. Although Habakkuk may not fully understand, he has learned to rely totally on God's wisdom and justice. He knows God can resolve issues in ways he could never have imagined. This God is certainly worthy of Habakkuk's praise and worship, which is how the book ends. Many of the righteous in Judah would have agreed with Habakkuk's words. They wondered what God was doing and struggled with the same issues as Habakkuk. God's words reassured them that he was in control and would deal appropriately with the nations.

READING PLAN: HABAKKUK

READING 1: Habakkuk 1:1–11

QUESTION(S): What is the prophet's first complaint (1:2–4), and how does God answer it (1:5–11)? What six things does Habakkuk claim that God is seeming to passively allow (1:3–4)? Do we see things like this in our culture today? What is so healthy about the way Habakkuk deals with his frustrations?

READING 2: Habakkuk 1:12–17

QUESTION(S): Habakkuk has a second complaint (1:13). What is it? Habakkuk basically says, “We are not as bad as the other guys are.” Why isn’t this a good way to think about our identity (see Matthew 7:3–5)? What do you think God is most concerned about when it comes to our relationship with him?

READING 3: Habakkuk 2:1-20

QUESTION(S): Habakkuk takes his stand to wait on the Lord’s reply (2:1). Why is waiting so hard for us? What are some benefits of waiting before reacting? In verse 4, God begins to address the prideful, arrogant Chaldeans (Babylonians). By contrast, what does it mean to live by faith? What are the evils against which the five “woes” of this chapter are addressed (2:6–20)? Are these evils found in the world today?

READING 4: Habakkuk 3:1-15

QUESTION(S): In these verses Habakkuk remembers the things that God has done. How can contemplating God’s actions in our world help your faith? How can Habakkuk’s prayer help us to understand the world news of our day? How important is God’s reputation to you?

READING 5: Habakkuk 3:16-19

QUESTION(S): What affect does Habakkuk’s vision and prayer have on the prophet (3:16-18)? How can we have an inner source of joy when everything seems to fall apart around us (see James 1:2–4)? When we don’t understand what God is doing, how can focusing on what God is like help us?

week 6

Behind the Text: Zephaniah



Prophetic Period: Exilic
The Issue Facing God's People: Unfaithfulness
The Prophetic Task: Grief

Purpose, occasion and background: In spite of having seen the destruction and exile of Israel (the northern kingdom), Judah (the southern kingdom) refuses to keep its covenant obligations to God. If Judah repents and abandons its evil ways, “perhaps” God will forgive (2:3). Regardless, God’s judgment will lead to renewal for Judah and other peoples (3:9–20). The book declares judgment on many nations, all of which opposed God through opposition to his people. The last nation warned is Judah herself (3:1–7). God is displeased with those who claimed to be His own people.

READING PLAN: ZEPHANIAH

READING 1: Zephaniah 1:1-18

QUESTION(S): Look at 1:7. What do you think Zephaniah means by the “day of the LORD?” Do you think this refers to a single day or a period of time? Now read 1:15–17. How is this day described and why do you think is God bringing this “distress on mankind?”

READING 2: Zephaniah 2:1-15

QUESTION(S): Look at 2:3. What is required in order to avoid God’s judgment? Now read 2:10-11. Why did the people of Moab experience God’s judgment? What do we learn about God’s protection of His people from these verses (see Genesis 12:3 and 2 Thessalonians 3:3)?

READING 3: Zephaniah 3:1-13

QUESTION(S): Look at 3:11-13. Considering the theme of judgment in the first two chapters, are you surprised to see verses here that express hope? What do you think it means to “seek refuge in the name of the LORD?” (See Matthew 12:21 and Acts 4:12.)

READING 4: Zephaniah 3:14-20

QUESTION(S): Read 3:17. What does it mean for God to “shout” over His people with joy while also being “quiet” in His love for them? What can these verses tell us about God and His relationship with us (see Psalm 149:4)?

READING 5: Zephaniah 1:1-3:20

QUESTION(S): The book of Zephaniah teaches us a lot about God’s judgment upon our sinful world. While the reality of God’s judgment should move us to be a changed people, how does this book and the reality of the gospel also give us hope as we look to the future (see Revelation 21:3–5)? How can you live this hope out, even in a small way, on a daily basis in the coming week?

week 7

Behind the Text: Obadiah and Nahum



Prophetic Period: Exilic
The Issue Facing God's People: Unfaithfulness
The Prophetic Task: Grief

Purpose, occasion and background:

Obadiah—the people of Jerusalem experienced God's judgment (v. 16a) when the Babylonians invaded and "cast lots for Jerusalem" (v. 11). The Edomites were descended from Jacob's brother Esau and were Israel's eastern neighbors. They should have assisted Israel during the crisis. Instead, they sided with the foreign invaders and even took advantage of Israel's difficulty (v. 10–14). Holy Zion had been defiled, and God's people were publicly shamed. Israel was devastated by the exile. Does Israel have a future? Will Zion be defiled forever? Will the plan for Abraham's offspring to bring blessing to the world come to nothing? Will Edom and the hostile nations triumph? Is God indifferent to all of this? Obadiah proclaimed God's word in response to this situation. The message of Obadiah essentially spells out what Lamentations 4:22 announces: restoration for Zion but doom for Edom.

Nahum—Nahum's book is a sequel to, and a dramatic contrast with, the book of Jonah. Jonah's mission to Nineveh was probably sometime in the first half of the eighth century B.C. (700s). To Jonah's dismay, the Ninevites listened to his message, repented, and were spared God's judgment. This repentance, however, did not last beyond 745 B.C., when Nineveh became the leading military power in the Near East. In 722 B.C. the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel. Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C., marking the end of the Assyrian empire.

READING PLAN: OBADIAH AND NAHUM

READING 1: Obadiah (All – only 21 verses)

QUESTION(S): The nation of Edom appeared to be getting away with evil, but God promised that this would not continue (v. 4). In fact, Edom did not get away with evil forever. Obadiah promises that no one will get away with evil (v. 15). Does this motivate you to act or change? Why or why not?

READING 2: Nahum 1:1-15

QUESTION(S): Nahum is writing during a time when Nineveh (the capital of Assyria) was extremely powerful. The Assyrians were notoriously cruel, and they persecuted the Jews. The Lord (much like Obadiah) promises to judge the guilty in the future (Nahum 1:3). If God promises that justice will be done in the future, then why do we so often insist on justice right now?

READING 3: Nahum 2:1-13

QUESTION(S): The LORD promises to wipe out those who do evil (2:13). Why do we tend to demand justice, but then sometimes cringe and complain when it is carried out?

READING 4: Nahum 3:1-19

QUESTION(S): God promises that Nineveh, like Thebes, will be crushed no matter who she thinks she has to defend her (3:8-10). Counting on man to rescue us will not succeed in the long run. Depending on anyone/anything other than God will not succeed in the long run. Are we counting on man rather than God in any area of our lives (see Jeremiah 17:5-8)? How can we change that?

READING 5: Reread your favorite chapter from this week.

QUESTION(S): What made this chapter powerful in your life? Is there a verse from this chapter that you might memorize?

week 8

Behind the Text: Zechariah



Prophetic Period: Restoration
The Issue Facing God's People: Uncertainty
The Prophetic Task: Hope

Purpose, occasion, background (taken from *The ESV Study Bible*, Crossway, 2008): Nearly 20 years after their return from the Babylonian exile in the time of Cyrus (538 B.C.), discouragement dogged God's people, replacing their earlier enthusiasm. The foundation of the temple had been laid shortly after the initial return, in 536 B.C., but powerful opposition had prevented any further progress on rebuilding the temple. Though Persian foreign policy accorded a significant role to local traditions—unlike the previous overlords, the Babylonians (prior to 538 B.C.)—life was still hard in the province of Judah (often referred to as “Yehud” in this period). Taxes were high, especially as the Persian king, Darius Hystaspes, prepared for a campaign against Egypt. There was little evidence of the kind of transformation of the state of things that the earlier prophets had anticipated, whether externally in a restoration of Jewish sovereignty, or internally in a moral reformation of the people. In particular, the city of Jerusalem was still only partially rebuilt and was on the sidelines of world significance. Under the circumstances, it was easy for the people to conclude that theirs was a “day of small things” (4:10) in which God was absent from his people. In such a context, faithful obedience was viewed by many as useless: pragmatically, it made more sense to pursue the best life possible in spite of the present difficulties.

Zechariah addressed such discouragement by reminding his hearers that, though hidden, God's envoys were watching everything, and that when the time was right, he would act to reorder the universe (1:8–11). Their forefathers had discovered God's faithfulness to judge his people if they failed to heed the words of the prophets (1:4–6). If the people would heed the words of the prophets and turn to the Lord, they would discover him turning to them. He would trouble the nations who were enjoying rest and grant rest to his troubled people, making Jerusalem once again the center of the

world, a place of universal pilgrimage (1:14–17). The temple that was being rebuilt and the priesthood that would serve in it were signs of the Lord's commitment to his people, a commitment that would be demonstrated by the ultimate removal of all their sin from the land (3:8–10). This would happen when the promised Davidic king, the Branch, arrived (3:8). The result would be peace, harmony, and prosperity for all the inhabitants of the land, as the Lord once more dwelt in their midst.

The latter chapters of Zechariah also show that the coming of this Davidic ruler will not be without challenge. A new ruler will come to Jerusalem, a ruler who will not be like the existing rulers but will be righteous and humble, bringing salvation (9:9–11). In contrast to the shepherds who feed themselves at the expense of the flock, this good shepherd will take care of the flock and provide for them (9:16). He will cleanse them of all their iniquities (13:1). Yet the flock will themselves reject this good shepherd, and the Lord's own sword will be unleashed against him (11:4–16; 13:7). The sheep will be scattered and left to their oppressors in a time of trial and testing. Yet ultimately God will redeem his flock and rescue his city. Final judgment will come upon all the nations that assaulted God's people, and the end result will be the complete holiness of Jerusalem. It will be restored as God's chosen city, to which the nations will come on pilgrimage (ch. 14).

The book of Zechariah is densely mined for quotations by the NT, whose authors discerned in it several prophecies concerning the Messiah's coming. The clearest instances come from Zechariah 8:16 (in Eph. 4:25), Zechariah 9:9 (in Matt. 21:5 and John 12:15), Zechariah 11:12–13 (in Matt. 27:9–10), Zechariah 12:10 (in John 19:37), and Zechariah 13:7 (in Matt. 26:31 and Mark 14:27). In addition to these are numerous allusions, which are sometimes difficult to assess; one estimate, however, finds about 54 passages from Zechariah echoed in about 67 different places in the NT, with the lion's share of these found in the book of Revelation.

READING PLAN: ZECHARIAH

READING 1: Zechariah 1-3

QUESTION(S): In these three chapters, Zechariah is given four visions that illustrate God's restoration of Jerusalem. In 1:7-2:5, how was God going to start bringing peace back to Jerusalem? In chapter 3, God begins to setup the leadership over the people again. In verses 3:6-7, what can we learn about personal restoration for our own lives from the angel's instructions to Joshua?

READING 2: Zechariah 4-6

QUESTION(S): In these three chapters, Zechariah is given four more visions that finish the pictures of God's restoration of Jerusalem. In chapter 4, God continues to establish the leadership in Jerusalem through the new governor, Zerubbabel. Why does God highlight the roles of high priest and governor as the key pieces of leadership to restore Israel? Re-read verses 6:9-6:15, where we read about the final piece of restoration after the visions. How is this coronation scene ultimately referring to Jesus? Read Ephesians 2:19-22. How are you a part of the "temple" referenced in Zechariah today?

READING 3: Zechariah 7-8

QUESTION(S): God gives instructions to his people to follow in this new time of restoration. Re-read 8:14-23. What element of spiritual formation is God asking you to focus on in your own life? How can you begin to obey this instruction in your life so that you are a blessing to those around you?

READING 4: Zechariah 9-11

QUESTION(S): In verse 9:9 we get one of the most famous prophecies in Zechariah. How does reading this verse in the historical context of this Old Testament book enhance the fulfillment of it in the person of Jesus many years later? In 11:12-14, we read another famous prophecy that refers to Judas Iscariot. In Zechariah, however, the result is a break in unity whereas in the Gospels we see how the betrayal of Judas ultimately leads to a restoration of unity. How has your union with Jesus resulted in greater oneness in your relationships with other people?

READING 5: Zechariah 12-14

QUESTION(S): In 12:10-13:2, we read a great description of repentance. Repentance involves mourning and cleansing. Where do you see these two steps of repentance in these verses? What idol in your own life do you need to repent of because you have put it in the place of God?

week 9
Behind the Text: Haggai



Prophetic Period: Restoration
The Issue Facing God's People: Uncertainty
The Prophetic Task: Hope

Purpose, occasion, background: Haggai ministered among the Jews who had returned to Judea after some 70 years of exile in Babylon. The Persian ruler Cyrus the Great captured Babylon in 539 B.C. In 538 he permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem so that they might rebuild the temple (Ezra 1-2). The work of rebuilding stalled, however, when opposition arose (Ezra 3:1-4:5). Haggai prophesied in an effort to motivate the people to renew their work of temple restoration. The work of temple restoration highlights the Lord's desire to renew a covenant relationship with his people (1:13; 2:4-5).

READING PLAN: HAGGAI

READING 1: Haggai 1:1-2:23 (whole book)

QUESTION(S): What is the book of Haggai about? Identify at least 2 key themes of the book. What connections can you make between the overall narrative of Haggai and issues we face in the 21st century?

READING 2: Haggai 1:1-5

QUESTION(S): Re-read verse 2 and identify an area of your life where you have yet to yield to God's will. Look at verse 4. Why were the Israelites not being obedient to God's command to rebuild the temple? What is keeping you from saying, "not my will, but your will be done?"

READING 3: Haggai 1:1–11 (focusing on verses 6–11)

QUESTION(S): Re-read verse 5: when you “consider your ways,” where have you “sown much and harvested little?” In verse 9, what is the reason God gives for the Israelites lack of fulfillment economically and spiritually? Is this a possible explanation for frustrated efforts in your own life? Why or why not?

READING 4: Haggai 1:12–2:9

QUESTION(S): What do you think this coming glory of the temple points to? Re-read Haggai 2:9. Can you think of any Scripture in the New Testament that fulfills this prophecy? Read John 2:13–22. How do these verses in Haggai help you better understand what John is teaching in his Gospel?

READING 5: Haggai 1:1–2:23

QUESTION(S): What is the most repeated phrase in Haggai (hint it is repeated 14 times in the short 38 verses of this book)? Use a study resource to figure out what this phrase means. Each major section of the book is dated by the phrase “Darius the king’s reign.” What might this phrase have to teach us about God’s sovereignty and the message of Haggai?

week 10

Behind the Text: Joel



Prophetic Period: Restoration

(Joel is difficult to date. Its themes help us see the issues facing God's people throughout the various prophetic periods.)

The Issue Facing God's People: Uncertainty

The Prophetic Task: Hope

Purpose, occasion, background: The “day of the LORD” is the dominant theme of the book of Joel. Both the nations (3:2–3) and Israel (1:15; 2:1–2) experience this judgment. However, for the repentant community, the “day” also holds out the hope of restoration (2:12–14). Ultimately, the Lord’s covenant faithfulness is expressed in his promises of abundance and protection (2:23–26; 3:1), which evidence his dwelling in the midst of his people (2:27; 3:17, 21). This is epitomized in the great promise of “my Spirit” that would be poured out on “all flesh” (2:28, 29; cf. Acts 2:17–21). Joel calls the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem to lament and return to the Lord during a time of national disaster. A locust plague has destroyed both wine (1:5, 7, 12) and grain (1:10). This threatens the people’s ability to present offerings in the temple (1:9, 13, 16).

READING PLAN: JOEL

READING 1: Joel 1:1-12

QUESTION(S): 1:1 reads “the word of the LORD came to Joel.” Have you clearly heard from the Lord lately through His word? If yes, share that...if not, why? In 1:3 we see that multiple generations will know of this great locust disaster. The Lord wanted many generations to know this story. What spiritual truths are you passing down to the next generation?

READING 2: Joel 1:13-20

QUESTION(S): In 1:13, 14, and 19 we see a call for a fast, which here signifies a call to repentance. Take some time either individually, or as a family, and ask the living God to search your hearts for areas where repentance is needed or areas where you need to ask for forgiveness.

READING 3: Joel 2:1-11

QUESTION(S): “the day of the LORD” is a key phrase in this book. Do you think this is the same “day of the LORD” that we find in chapter 1? What do we learn about our Lord in this passage? What characteristics about our God do we learn from this text?

READING 4: Joel 2:12-27

QUESTION(S): Look at Joel 1:13 and 2:16. What are the differences, and what do you think the significance of these differences is? In verses 18 and 19, we see some amazing statements such as: “...the LORD became jealous” and “The LORD answered.” Do you believe the Lord is jealous for His people? Do you believe the Lord hears and answers His people? Do you believe this is true for YOU? How might this truth change how we live?

READING 5: Joel 2:28-3:20

QUESTION(S): Just like the land sometimes goes through droughts and hard times, so do we personally, due to our disobedience. In 2:32 and 3:1, we see that we can call upon the Lord and that He alone has the power to restore the dryness and fruitlessness in our lives. Spend some time reflecting on your life. Are there area(s) of disobedience in your life that need to be confessed? Ask God to restore the dry areas in your life. (For example it could be a relationship that needs restoration.)

week 11

Behind the Text: Malachi



Prophetic Period: Restoration
The Issue Facing God's People: Uncertainty
The Prophetic Task: Hope

Purpose, occasion, background (taken from *The ESV Study Bible*, Crossway, 2008): Malachi's ministry took place nearly a hundred years after the decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C., which ended the Babylonian captivity and allowed the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild the temple (2 Chron. 36:23). This was some 80 years after Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the rebuilding of that temple with promises of God's blessing, the engrafting of the nations, prosperity, expansion, peace, and the return of God's own glorious presence (cf. Haggai 2; Zech. 1:16-17; 2:1-13; 8:1-9:17). To Malachi's disillusioned contemporaries, these predictions must have seemed a cruel mockery. In contrast to the glowing promises, the harsh reality was one of economic privation, prolonged drought, crop failure, and pestilence (Mal. 3:10ff.).

After the return from exile, Judah remained an almost insignificant territory of about 20 by 30 miles (32 by 48 km), inhabited by a population of perhaps 150,000. Although they enjoyed the benefits of Persia's enlightened policy of religious toleration and limited self-rule, the Jews acutely felt their subjugation to a foreign power (Neh. 1:3; 9:36ff.), and they suffered persistent opposition from their neighbors (Ezra 4:23; Dan. 9:25). Judah was no longer an independent nation and was no longer ruled by a Davidic king.

Worst of all, in spite of the promises of the coming Messiah and God's own glorious presence (e.g., Zech. 1:16ff.; 2:4, 10-13; 8:3-17, 23; 9:9-13), Israel experienced only spiritual destitution. Unlike Bible books from earlier periods, the postexilic books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther are remarkably candid in their description of Judah as generally lacking miraculous evidences of God's presence. In contrast to both Solomon's temple and the prophetic promise of the restored temple (Ezekiel 40-43), the actual postexilic temple was physically and spiritually inferior. As Malachi 3:1 implies, the

Most Holy Place in this second temple had no visible manifestation of the glory of God. Though God was certainly alive and well (as revealed, e.g., by his remarkable providences in the book of Esther), it was a period in which God’s people had to live more by faith than by sight.

READING PLAN: MALACHI

READING 1: Malachi 1:1-5

QUESTION(S): In 1:2, we read these words, “I have loved you.” Take a moment and reflect on how God has loved you this past year. Afterward, share these truths with your spouse, family, friends, or someone at work this week. In verse 3, God states, “Esau I have hated.” How do you explain this statement in light of verse 2?

READING 2: Malachi 1:6-2:9

QUESTION(S): The word “messenger” is used throughout this book. (Malachi means “messenger.”) In verse 2:7–8, we see the contrast between a good messenger and a bad one. Do you guard knowledge? Do people seek you for counsel? Take some time to reflect about the type of counsel you are or have given people. Are you mixing worldly counsel with biblical counsel? Pray and ask our Lord to give you wisdom and counsel that honors Him!

READING 3: Malachi 2:10–3:6

QUESTION(S): Read 2:10 again and ask, “How am I treating my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, my pastors, or my leaders?” Look at verses 15 and 16. How are you treating your spouse? Are you living in such a way that encourages trust or distrust?

READING 4: Malachi 3:11-18

QUESTION(S): Most of this book is dealing with the people of God backsliding in their faith. Look again at 3:8–10 and ask God to reveal to you any areas of your life that you are robbing from Him? Spend 2-3 minutes in quiet, asking Him to search and speak to you about these areas. If any there are any areas, use this time to confess this to Him.

READING 5: Malachi 4

QUESTION(S): Verses 1 and 2 give us great hope. They let us know that one day, all the wrongs will be set right (see Revelation 21:3–5). It also informs us that those who fear the Lord will find healing... salvation in Jesus. Take a moment and write down 5 names of people you can begin to pray for that need to hear about the hope of Jesus. Now begin to look for opportunities to share with those on your list.

SUMMER BIBLE STUDY
MINOR PROPHETS



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