

Study Outlines

for

The Minor Prophets

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Hosea: The Preacher and the Prostitute

Theme: God's faithful love for an unfaithful people

And the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins. (Hosea 3:1)

Story: Hosea is told by God to marry a (future?) prostitute. This is an image of God's love for a people that continually turn from Him

Imagery:

1. Husband and wife
2. Gardener and vine (9:10, 16; 10:1; 14:4-7)
3. Father and son (11:1-9)

Israel's problem: Misplaced trust

1. False gods (2:8, 13; 4:10-14; 8:4-6)
2. Other nations (7:8-12; 8:8-10; 12:1)
3. Military strength (1:7; 8:14; 10:13-14)
4. Legalistic worship (2:11; 8:12-13; 9:4-5)

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. (Hosea 6:6)

The Pronouncement:

Israel will return to Egypt/Assyria (11:5-6), but will one day be restored (11:10-11)

Lessons for us:

1. God wants an intimate relationship with us, not just ritualistic obedience
2. God is willing to suffer and sacrifice for us
3. God wants us to place our trust fully in Him

Joel: Recovering From A Natural Disaster

Theme: Disasters are a time to turn to God

“And rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.”

(Joel 2:13)

Story: After the people of Judah return from Babylonian captivity and rebuild the temple, their land is destroyed by locusts. Joel calls the people to turn to God in this time of crisis

Part 1 — The Disaster:

1. This disaster is so bad that it will be remembered for generations (1:2-3)
2. It affected every part of Jewish life
 - a. There will be no wine (1:5)
 - b. The priests have nothing for sacrifices (1:9, 13)
 - c. Farmers lost their crops before their very eyes (1:11-12)
 - d. Even the animals suffer (1:18-20)
3. Joel says that this disaster is an act of God (2:1-11)
4. He calls the people to repentance (2:12-17)

Part 2 — The Relief:

1. Apparently the people repent and God sends relief (2:18-27)
2. Another day of the LORD is coming (2:31; 3:14)
 - a. God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh (2:28-32)
 - b. God will judge the nations for what they did to His people
 - 1) They will come to the valley of Jehosaphat (The LORD judges) (3:2, 12), the valley of decision (3:14)
 - 2) There they will be found guilty for overrunning God's people, scattering them among the nations, mistreating them, and carrying off the temple treasures (3:2-3, 5-6, 19)

Lessons for us:

1. Every disaster is a time to return to God
2. God wants our hearts, not empty rituals
3. God is a loving God above all, but He will punish sin

Amos: Shepherd made prophet

Theme: Peace and prosperity are not necessarily signs of God's pleasure.

"The lion has roared — who will not fear? The Sovereign LORD has spoken — who can but prophesy?"

(Amos 3:8)

Story: Amos, a poor migrant worker from Judah, is called to go north to Israel to proclaim God's judgment. He prophesied during the time of King Jeroboam II of Israel.

God Judges the Nations:

1. One "surprise" message in Amos is that of God's love for and judgment of all nations (Amos 9:7)
2. God was ready to punish the nations around Israel:
 - a. Syria (1:3-5)
 - b. Philistia (1:6-8)
 - c. Phoenicia (1:9-10)
 - d. Edom (1:11-12)
 - e. Ammon (1:13-15)
 - f. Moab (2:1-3)
 - g. Judah (2:4-5)
3. God was also ready to punish Israel (2:6-16)
 - a. God had chosen Israel (3:2)
 - b. He had given them His law and taught them with his prophets
 - c. Israel had become consumed with materialism (4:1; 6:1-7)
 - d. Social injustice ran rampant (2:6-8; 5:7-15; 8:4-6)
 - e. "Religiosity" had replaced a relationship with God (4:4-5; 5:4-6, 21-27)
 - f. They had opposed all who would correct them (2:11-12; 7:10-13)

Five visions of God's Judgment on Israel:

1. Locusts (7:1-3)
2. Fire (7:4-6)
3. The plumb line (7:7-9)
4. The basket of ripe fruit (8:1-3)
5. The LORD standing beside the altar (9:1-10)

Lessons for us:

1. We must constantly guard against complacency
2. Being "the right people" is no substitute for being right with God

Obadiah: Human Pride Meets Divine Justice

Theme: Proud Edom is about to be punished

“The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling, who say in your heart, “Who will bring me down to the ground?” Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD.”

(Obadiah 3-4)

Story: Longtime enemy of Israel, Edom, is about to be punished for his sins. (Obadiah means “servant of Yahweh/Jehovah.” It is a common name in the Old Testament)

Background — Edom/Esau (Seir):

1. The conflict between Jacob and Esau started in the womb (Gen. 25:21-26)
2. Jacob took Esau’s inheritance rights (Gen. 25:27-34; Gen. 27)
3. Edom became a nation (Gen. 36:8-9)
4. The enmity between Edom and Israel was constant (Num. 20:14-21; 2 Sam. 8:13-14; Psa. 137:7)
5. God, however considered them as brothers (Deut. 23:7)
6. Edom’s mistreatment of his brother Israel brought him special condemnation (Amos 1:11; Mal. 1:2-5)

The book of Obadiah:

1. The judgment on Edom
 - a. Main cause: Edom’s pride (2-4)
 - b. Description of the judgment
 - 1) Worse than thieves or harvesters (5-6)
 - 2) Accompanied by betrayal (7)
 - 3) Complete military defeat (8-9)
 - c. Edom’s crimes against Israel (10-14)
2. The Day of the LORD is coming (15-21)

Lessons for us:

Pride is one of the deadliest sins... and we need to take it seriously

- As a nation
- As a church
- As individuals

Jonah: Unloving, Uncaring... and Used by God

Theme: God loves and cares about all nations, even when His people don't

He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."

(Jonah 4:2)

The Story:

1. God tells Jonah [2 Kings 14:25; Matthew 12:41] to go announce Nineveh's destruction (Jonah 1:1-2)
2. Jonah heads the other way (1:3)
3. God sends a great storm against the ship (1:4)
4. The sailors discover Jonah's rebellion against God (1:5-13)
5. The sailors unwillingly throw Jonah overboard, calming the sea (1:14-16)
6. God saves Jonah with a great fish (1:17)
7. Returning to dry land, Jonah preaches doom in Nineveh (2:10-3:4)
8. The Ninevites believe and repent (3:5-9)
9. God spares Nineveh (3:10)
10. Jonah is extremely angry with God because of His mercy (4:1-4)
11. God tries to teach Jonah about His love (4:5-11)

The Unlikely Prophet:

1. Jonah has no desire to see the ungodly turn to God.
2. Jonah directly disobeys God.
3. In the belly of the fish, Jonah mainly repeats lines from the Psalms (Psalms 69; 88; 130).
4. When Nineveh is spared, Jonah is outraged.
5. He sits and waits, hopeful that God will still destroy the city.
6. He shows more love and compassion for a plant than for his fellow man.

Lessons for us:

1. God loves everyone and wants all to be saved.
2. God surprises with His love and mercy.
3. Even in light of that fact, we are to strictly speak the message given to us.

Micah: Recovering From A Natural Disaster

Theme: God will punish His people for their injustice, then He will restore them.

“Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the LORD’s wrath, until he pleads my case and establishes my right. He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness.”

(Micah 7:9)

Story: Micah, from a small town in South Judah, prophesies against North Israel and South Judah. (He was a contemporary of Isaiah)

Structure of the book:

1. Three Main Sections (Chapters 1-2, 3-5 and 6-7)
2. The first and last sections are similar
 - a. God’s lawsuit (1:2-7; 6:1-8)
 - b. The prophet’s lament (1:8-16; 7:1-6)
 - c. The sin of God’s people (2:1-11; 6:9-16)
 - d. The promise of hope (2:12-13; 7:7-20)
3. The middle section contains announcements of doom and announcements of hope
 - a. Three of doom (3:1-4; 3:5-8; 3:9-12)
 - b. Seven of hope (4:1-5; 4:6-8; 4:9-10; 4:11-13; 5:1-6; 5:7-9; 5:10-15)

The bad guys:

1. Those who oppress others for material gain (2:1-2)
2. Corrupt rulers who loved evil (3:1-3, 9-11)
3. Prophets and priests who preached what those who paid them wanted to hear (3:5)

What does God want? (6:6-8)

1. This is an unnecessary question; God has made it clear
2. God wants three things
 - a. Men should deal justly with one another
 - b. They should be kind (steadfast) in their relationships
 - c. They should be humble toward God

Lessons for us:

1. God has always sought a faithful remnant
2. God looks for two things: (1) Love God; (2) Love your neighbor

Nahum: Jonah's Dream Come True

Theme: God is slow to anger, but will punish evildoers

“The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him, but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of [Nineveh]; he will pursue his foes into darkness.”

(Nahum 1: 7-8)

Story: More than a century after the days of Jonah, the time for Nineveh's destruction is at hand. The book was written after the fall of Thebes in 663 b.c. (3:8-10) and before the fall of Nineveh in 612

Outline of the book (from the NIV Study Bible):

- I. Title (1:1)
- II. Nineveh's Judge (1:2-15)
 - A. The Lord's Kindness and Sternness (1:2-8)
 - B. Nineveh's Overthrow and Judah's Joy (1:9-15)
- III. Nineveh's Judgment (ch. 2)
 - A. Nineveh Besieged (2:1-10)
 - B. Nineveh's Desolation Contrasted with Her Former Glory (2:11-13)
- IV. Nineveh's Total Destruction (ch. 3)
 - A. Nineveh's Sins (3:1-4)
 - B. Nineveh's Doom (3:5-19)

The sins of Assyria:

- 1. The worship of other gods (1:14)
- 2. The viciousness of their attacks on other nations (2:12)
- 3. Pride (1:12; 2:9; 3:15-17)

Lessons for us:

- 1. There is no “once saved, always saved”
- 2. God expects man to acknowledge Him and to do right by his neighbor

*Lo, all the pomp of yesterday, is one with Nineveh and Tyre.
Judge of the nations, spare us yet—
Lest we forget, lest we forget!*

Rudyard Kipling

Habakkuk: Filing a Complaint With God

Theme: Why doesn't God punish the wicked?

"Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?"

(Habakkuk 1: 13)

Story: Habakkuk was a contemporary of Jeremiah, prophesying during the time when Babylonia was replacing Assyria as the dominant nation.

Outline of the book (from the NIV Study Bible):

- I. Title (1:1)
- II. Habakkuk's First Complaint: Why does the evil in Judah go unpunished? (1:2-4)
- III. God's Answer: The Babylonians will punish Judah (1:5-11)
- IV. Habakkuk's Second Complaint: How can a just God use wicked Babylon to punish a people more righteous than themselves? (1:12-2:1)
- V. God's Answer: Babylon will be punished, and faith will be rewarded (2:2-20)
- VI. Habakkuk's Prayer: After asking for manifestations of God's wrath and mercy (as he has seen in the past), he closes with a confession of trust and joy in God (ch. 3)

The faith of Habakkuk:

1. The God of yesterday is the God of today (3:2)
2. God will act in His own time (3:16)
3. God's people rejoice in Him even when their circumstances are bad (3:17-19)

Lessons for us:

1. God's ways are not always discernible to man
2. We need to be open and honest in our relationship with God

Zephaniah: A Royal Becomes a Prophet

Theme: God will act, but a remnant will be saved

“On that day you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain. But I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD”

(Zephaniah 3:11-12)

Story: Zephaniah was a fourth-generation descendant of King Hezekiah of Judah. Prophesying during the reign of King Josiah (before the reforms), he pronounced God’s judgment on Judah.

Basic outline of the book:

- I. The Day of the Lord Coming (1:1-2:3)
- II. God’s Judgment on the Nations (2:4-3:8)
- III. Redemption of the Remnant (3:9-20)

The sins of Judah:

1. Serving other gods (1:4-5)
2. Turning away from God (1:6)
3. Following the customs of other nations (1:8-9)
4. Complacency (1:12-13)
5. Trusting in wealth (1:18)
6. Rejection of God’s correction (3:2)
7. Corrupt leaders (3:4)
8. Pride! (3:11-12)

“What must I do to be saved?” (2:3; 3:12-13):

1. Seek God
2. Seek righteousness
3. Seek humility

Lessons for us:

1. God wants His people to be humble before Him (but not afraid!)
2. God’s ultimate goal is not to punish; it is to save a group of people that truly love, honor and worship Him

Haggai: A Time to Build

Theme: If the people will dedicate themselves to God's work, He will bless them

"Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"

(Haggai 1:3-4)

Story: In 538 B.C., King Cyrus of Persia commissioned the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4; 6:3-5). They returned under the leadership of Sheshbazzar (the prince), Zerubbabel and Joshua (the high priest). The work began well, but when faced with opposition by the Samaritans, the Jews stopped working for 16 years. In the second year of King Darius (520 B.C.) the prophets Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the people to begin work again (Ezra 5:1-2; 6:14).

Reasons for not doing God's work:

1. Waiting for "the right time" (1:2)
2. More interested in one's own interests (1:4, 9)
3. Low view of the value of the work (2:3)

God's way with the apathetic:

1. He opposed their efforts (1:5-11; 2:15-19)
2. He challenged them to do His work (1:8; 2:4)
3. He promised His presence (1:13; 2:4, 20-23)
4. He blessed their obedience (2:19)

The response of God's people:

1. They feared God (1:12)
2. They obeyed God (1:12)
3. They "got fired up" (1:14)
4. They worked on God's temple (1:14)

Lessons for us:

1. Now is the time to do God's work; we must overcome all excuses
2. God will oppose us at times when we take the wrong path; He will bless us in the same way when we do His will
3. Holiness is not contagious; sinfulness is contagious (2:10-14)

Zechariah: The Coming of the Lord

Theme: If the people will put their trust wholly in God, their future will be a bright one.

‘Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of men and livestock in it. And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will be its glory within.’”

(Zechariah 2:4-5)

Story: In the second year of King Darius (520 B.C.) Zechariah, along with Haggai, encouraged the people to finish reconstructing the temple (Ezra 5:1-2; 6:14)

Zechariah’s Eight Visions (Chapters 1-6):

1. The heavenly horses (1:7-17)
2. Four horns, four craftsmen (1:18-21)
3. The man with the measuring line (2:1-13)
4. Joshua’s filthy garments (3:1-10)
5. The lampstand and the two olive trees (4:1-14)
6. The flying scroll (5:1-4)
7. The woman in the basket (5:5-11)
8. The four chariots (6:1-15)

Lessons on True Religion (Chapters 7-8):

1. Some men inquired about the fasts of the fifth and seventh months (7:1-3)
2. God answered that their rites meant nothing without a change of heart
3. He told them that what he really wanted was them to do right by their fellow man (7:9-10; 8:16-17)
4. Their fasts would turn into triumphant feasts (8:18-23)

God’s Victory Over All Enemies of His People:

1. The shepherd and his flock (9-11)
2. The purification of Israel (12-13)
3. The triumph of God (14)

Lessons for us:

1. God’s plan continually marches forward
2. True religion is about our lifestyle, not our worship style

Malachi: Conversations with God

Theme: We must remain faithful to God even when we don't see the realization of His promises.

Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

(Malachi 3:1)

Story: Malachi, whose name means "my messenger," seems to have been written in the time of Nehemiah (after Haggai and Zechariah). It deals with the problems in Judah following the return from Babylonia

God speaks:

3. **"I have loved you" (1:1-5)**
 - God has shown His love for His people by punishing Edom.
4. **"You priests have despised my name." (1:6-2:9)**
 - The priests have not honored God as a son his father nor as a servant his master.
 - The priests are not respected because of the way they live.
5. **"Judah profanes the covenant" (2:10-16)**
 - The people of Judah have married worshippers of foreign gods.
 - The people have scorned their marriage vows.
6. **"You have wearied me with your words." (2:17-3:5)**
 - The people have been saying that God does not punish wickedness.
7. **"You have robbed me." (3:6-12)**
 - By not bringing their tithes, the people have robbed God.
8. **"You have said harsh things against me." (3:13-4:3)**
 - The Jews have declared that there is no profit in serving God.
9. **"I will send the prophet Elijah" (4:4-6)**

Lessons for us:

1. God is at work even when we aren't aware of it
2. We must be faithful to God in every circumstance
3. We must worship God from the heart