

SEASON IN THE MINORS

INTRODUCTION

We are in the midst of a 4-week series on the Minor Prophets. The Minor Prophets are set of twelve Old Testament books that get their name not because of “minor” significance but because they are more succinct than the five Major Prophets. Before the time of Christ, these writings were joined as one scroll and known as “the twelve”. In the late 4th Century, the twelve became known as the Minor Prophets. The prophets of focus in our series are Micah, Hosea, Habakkuk, and Zechariah. It’s our hope that spending some personal time reading the words of these prophets will help you become more familiar with the rich and troubling history of Old Testament Israel and deepen your faith in God’s never-ending justice, restoration, and love.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Each week includes a one-page summary of the book and three readings. Take time to make notes and interact with us on social media, sharing your observations, questions, key statements, and any personal reflections. We have someone on staff who is happy to answer any questions you may have!

HISTORY OF ISRAEL

The Minor Prophets cover a 400-year span of history moving through the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Empires. There were three prophets to the northern kingdom of Israel, six prophets to the southern kingdom of Judah, and three prophets following Jewish exile. This chart helps see the timeline of when the Minor Prophets wrote, to whom they wrote, and the geopolitical realities of when they wrote.

THE TIME OF THE PROPHETS AT A GLANCE:

Following civil war the kingdom divided in 931 B.C.

Israel in the north with 12 tribes

Judah in the South with 2 tribes

The shifting world powers

Assyria 750-612 B.C.

Babylon 612-539 B.C.

Persia 539-330 B.C.

The ministry and writing of the prophets (in our series)

Hosea to Israel ~760-715 B.C.

Micah to Judah ~735-710 B.C.

Habakkuk to Judah ~609-598 B.C.

Zechariah to post-exile Israel 520-? B.C.

Captivity

Israel taken into Assyrian captivity in 722 B.C.

Nineveh, capital city of Assyria, destroyed by Babylonians in 612 B.C.

Deportation of Jews from Judah to Babylon begins in 606 B.C.

Jerusalem destroyed in 586 B.C.

Babylon falls to Persia in 539 B.C.

Remnant of Jews return to a united Israel in 536 B.C. with mission to rebuild.

WEEK ONE

HOSEA

INTRODUCTION

During Israel's final hours, God called Hosea to prophesy. The looming national tragedy is intensely illustrated by Hosea's own personal tragedy. His marriage is a map and mirror for the consequences of faithlessness and the power of unconditional love in "buying back" a lost love.

AUTHOR

Hosea's name means "salvation" and his ministry is to the northern kingdom of Israel (also called Ephraim, after its largest tribe). Despite prosperity and growth, the people of Israel are cultivating a culture marked by moral corruption and spiritual adultery. In the midst of this culture, Hosea is told (by God) to marry a woman named Gomer. He finds his personal life to be an accurate and tragic dramatization of the unfaithfulness of God's people. Over his 40 years of ministry, Hosea repeatedly prophesies God's abhorrence of the sins of His people, His judgment is certain, and God's loyal love stands firm.

DATE & SETTING Hosea ministered to the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II (782-753 B.C.). His prophetic ministry spanned a total of seven kings in Israel and four kings in Judah (southern kingdom). Hosea was a younger contemporary of Amos, another prophet to the northern kingdom. He was also a contemporary of Isaiah and Micah who ministered to the southern kingdom.

At the start of Hosea's ministry, Israel was enjoying political and economic prosperity (~755 B.C.). After Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 B.C.) assumed power in Assyria, the nation of Israel began to experience the early rumblings of a new world power. The reign of Israel's final six kings were brief as four were murdered and a fifth was taken captive by Assyria. The final years of the northern kingdom were marked by confusion and decline. Despite this, the people refused to heed Hosea's warning of imminent judgment.

THEME The adultery of Gomer (chapter 1) illustrates the sin of Israel (4-7), the degeneration of Gomer (2) represents the judgment of Israel (8-10), and Hosea's redemption of Gomer (3) illustrates the restoration of Israel (11-14). More than any other Old Testament prophet, Hosea's personal experiences reveal his prophetic message.

WEEK ONE

READ

There are three readings for this week. As you read each day, use the questions below as a guide to go deeper.

Reading 1: Hosea 1 -3

Reading 2: Hosea 4-8

Reading 3: Hosea 9-14

OBSERVATIONS

What do you see? Who's involved? What is happening?

QUESTIONS What is unclear? What do you want to understand more fully?

KEY STATEMENTS Are there any phrases that stand out to you?

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS What do you hear God saying through his word? What difference does this text make for you?

WEEK TWO

MICAH

INTRODUCTION

Micah prophesied during a period of intense social injustice in the southern kingdom of Judah. Princes thrived on cruelty, violence, and corruption. Priests ministered to satisfy greed. Landlords stole from the poor and evicted widows. Judges lusted after bribes. Businessmen used deceitful scales and weights. Immorality infused itself in every aspect and segment of society. Micah enumerates the sins of Judah, which will ultimately lead to destruction and captivity. However, in the midst of despair a divine deliverer will appear and righteousness will prevail. Though justice is now trampled, it will one day triumph.

AUTHOR

Like Amos, Micah grew up in rural surroundings, about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem. God called Micah to deliver a direct message of judgment to the princes and people of Judah's capital city of Jerusalem. Burdened by the abusive treatment of the poor by the rich and influential, Micah rebukes those who would use their social or political power for personal gain. Micah's name means "who is like God?" In the final verses of his book, Micah turns the rhetorical phrase, "Who is a God like you?"

DATE & SETTING Micah prophesied during the days of Judah's kings Jotham (739-731 B.C.), Ahaz (731-715 B.C.), and Hezekiah (715-686 B.C.) and his prophecies ranged from about 735 to 710 B.C. While Micah deals primarily with Judah, he also addresses the northern kingdom of Israel and predicts the fall of Samaria (1:6). Most of his ministry took place prior to Israel's captivity by Assyria. Micah was a contemporary of Hosea in the northern kingdom and Isaiah in the court of Jerusalem. At the time of Micah's prophecies, Assyria reached the zenith of its power and was a constant threat to Judah. Babylon was under Assyrian domination, and Micah's prediction of a future Babylonian captivity for Judah (4:10) appeared farfetched.

THEME Micah juxtaposes the injustice of Judah and the righteousness and justice of Yaweh. In thirds, the book deals with a specific indictment of Judah's sins, the judgment coming as a result, and the hope and consolation ahead when God's justice triumphs. True peace and justice will prevail only when Messiah reigns. In Micah we learn about the integral relationship between true spirituality and social ethics. A person and nation that pursues humility and obedience to God are a people who pursue justice and equity tempered with mercy and compassion.

WEEK TWO

READ

There are three readings for this week. As you read each day, use the questions below as a guide to go deeper.

Reading 1: Micah 1-3

Reading 2: Micah 4-5

Reading 3: Micah 6-7

OBSERVATIONS

What do you see? Who's involved? What is happening?

QUESTIONS What is unclear? What do you want to understand more fully?

KEY STATEMENTS Are there any phrases that stand out to you?

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS What do you hear God saying through his word? What difference does this text make for you?

WEEK THREE

HABAKKUK

INTRODUCTION

A highly introspective and declarative prophet, Habakkuk observes the violence and injustice of his native Judah. As perplexing as Habakkuk's questions are, God's reply is even more shocking than the conditions of Judah. God is far from inactive. Despite the shock and dismay of Habakkuk's reaction to his plan of judgment, God patiently instructs his prophet until he finds a space of peace and a psalm of praise.

AUTHOR

We know relatively little about Habakkuk. His name means, "one who embraces." This meaning is appropriate as we find Habakkuk choosing to embrace God regardless of what happens to Judah or how it happens.

DATE & SETTING Habakkuk prophesied during the final period of Judah's sinful days. The book references the Babylonian invasion as an imminent event. Most likely, Habakkuk's prophecy takes place during the early part of the godless king, Jehoiakim (609- 597 B.C.). The Babylonians began to rise to power during the reign of Nabopolassar (626-605 B.C.) and in 612 B.C. they destroyed the Assyrian capital of Nineveh (modern-day Mosul, Iraq). Nabopolassar's successor, Nebuchadnezzar, came to power in 605 B.C. extended his military conquests west, invading Judah in his first year, deporting ten thousand of Jerusalem's leaders to Babylon.

THEME The circumstances of life and how we experience those circumstances sometimes appear to contradict God's power, purposes, and promises. Habakkuk struggled in his faith when he witnessed flagrant violation of God's law and the distortion of justice on every level of society without fear of divine intervention. The prophet's desire to understand God's allowance of unpunished sin was met with the revelation of God's intention to use Babylon as his means of judgment. This response created even greater disequilibrium within Habakkuk. In time, the prophet learned to hold his own understanding loosely and to trust in God's wisdom, goodness, and power. God's plan is perfect and nothing can stand in the way of its ultimate fulfillment. God is on the throne, the Lord of history, and the ruler of nations. He is the most worthy object of faith, and the righteous will trust him at all times.

WEEK THREE

READ

There are three readings for this week. As you read each day, use the questions below as a guide to go deeper.

Reading 1: Habakkuk 1

Reading 2: Habakkuk 2

Reading 3: Habakkuk 3

OBSERVATIONS

What do you see? Who's involved? What is happening?

QUESTIONS What is unclear? What do you want to understand more fully?

KEY STATEMENTS Are there any phrases that stand out to you?

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS What do you hear God saying through his word? What difference does this text make for you?

WEEK FOUR

ZECHARIAH

INTRODUCTION

Zechariah is a prophet of encouragement and hope. Babylonian exile is over and the people of Israel have returned home. However the people who have returned are at least a generation removed from those who were taken into captivity. And now, at least a dozen years have passed and the rebuilding of the temple is still not complete. Zechariah is commissioned by God to encourage the people to complete this unfinished responsibility. Zechariah shares a compelling vision with Israel: the temple must be built, for one day Messiah's glory will inhabit it. With this kind of motivation, the people rally for their Messiah is coming.

AUTHOR

Zechariah's name means "God remembers" and was a popular name in Old Testament books; shared by no fewer than 29 people. Like his prophet predecessors, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Zechariah was of priestly lineage. He was born in Babylon during captivity and was brought to Palestine by his grandfather when Jewish exiles returned under Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest. Jewish tradition tells us that Zechariah was a member of the Great Synagogue that collected and preserved the canon of revealed Scripture.

DATE & SETTING Zechariah, chapters 1-8, are the historical setting for the rebuilding of the temple (resumed in 520 B.C. and complete in 516 B.C.). Chapters 9-14 of Zechariah are undated but references to Greece indicate a date between 480-470 B.C. This would indicate that Darius I (521-486 B.C.) was succeeded in power by Xerxes (486-464 B.C.). Xerxes is the king who deposed Queen Vashti and made Esther queen of Persia (see book of Esther).

THEME Finishing the temple is both a sign of stability and worship as well as a sign of future hope pointing to the time when Messiah comes to bring salvation to Israel. Throughout Zechariah's writing, he attests to God's covenant faithfulness toward Israel through the work of the Messiah, especially in chapters 9-14. In the midst of Gentile domination, the prophet emphasizes the history and future of Israel. This hope of glory was a source of reassurance to the Jewish remnant at a time when everything around them was unsettled and the nation lacked direction. Zechariah wrote to inspire the people to spiritual revival that they might call upon the Lord with humble hearts and commit their lives to him.

WEEK FOUR

READ

There are three readings for this week. As you read each day, use the questions below as a guide to go deeper.

Reading 1: Zechariah 1-6

Reading 2: Zechariah 7-8

Reading 3: Zechariah 9-14

OBSERVATIONS

What do you see? Who's involved? What is happening?

QUESTIONS What is unclear? What do you want to understand more fully?

KEY STATEMENTS Are there any phrases that stand out to you?

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS What do you hear God saying through his word? What difference does this text make for you?