



Introduction to the Minor Prophets

The Twelve

These prophetic messages were given to declare to God's people his judgement for their faithlessness to the covenant with him. This judgment was not without reprieve however, as God promised restoration and redemption all throughout. The messages of the prophets were carefully constructed into one book and individual messages were orchestrated by God to produce one wholistic message throughout them all.

The timeline of the twelve are all set within a 350-400 year period stretching from between 800 BC to about 400 BC. The nation of Israel had split into two kingdoms; the Northern Kingdom of Israel comprising of 10 tribes, and the

southern kingdom of Judah comprising of Judah and Benjamin. The prophets served as God's messengers, speaking on behalf of the Lord to his people to these two nations, and to surrounding nations as well.

Themes that we will see through this study show us

- (a) God's love for Israel, and the horrendous nature of sin
- (b) God's Covenantal Commitment to Israel
- (c) The necessity for God's people to reflect God's character
- (d) Future judgment of the wicked and salvation for the righteous
- (e) How God brings about that Salvation in the promise of a new kingdom.

The goal of this survey of the Minor Prophets: Understand better the historical context, central message and timeless truths that we can apply or hold on to in our lives today.

Nahum

Historical Setting: Nahum was probably preaching in mid 7th century BC during the years of in 663 BC, but by 650 BC. He was pre-exilic but after the Assyrian Conquest of the Northern Kingdom Israel. He was prophesying about Assyria and Nineveh as the Assyrian empire was just beginning to wane. In the next 35 years, it would come crumbling down and Nineveh would be destroyed by 612 BC.

Central Message:

Outline:

- Chapter 1 - Introductory Psalm
 - Proclamation against all injustice and oppression worldwide.
- Chapter 2 - Doom of Nineveh and Deliverance of Judah
 - Proclamation against Nineveh specifically. It's here we look back at a prophet from previous weeks who also prophesied destruction of Nineveh. Jonah. This time however, the King and the city do not repent, and God's judgment does come on the city and it is overthrown and destroyed, and the king is brought low by the Babylonians.
 - Not only would Assyria be destroyed, but Judah would actually be restored.
- Chapter 3 - Siege of Nineveh and the destruction of the king
 - We see here a description of how Nineveh will fall, and how the people will rejoice at the death of the king of Assyria because he was so cruel. The blood thirsty violent nation would fall in the same way in which it was built.

Themes: Future judgment of the wicked and salvation for the righteous. How God brings about that salvation in the promise of a new kingdom.

Timeless Application: God's heart is for those who are oppressed and downtrodden, for those who have been taken advantage of and abused by the rich and powerful

The application for us then, is to consider what it mean for us to do as the Lord does, and help those who are oppressed and downtrodden, and lead them to take refuge in him and hope in the promises of God.

Habakkuk

Historical Setting: Habakkuk very likely prophesied between 640-590 BC during the reign of Josiah, who by all accounts was a king who followed the Lord and led the nation in religious reform of the idol worship that was so rampant during the time of his grandfather Manasseh.

Central Message: Habakkuk is a lament that focuses on the injustice and what God is doing about it. Life in Israel is horrible, God's law has been rejected, injustice and violence are rampant and tolerated by the leaders of the country. Habakkuk is asking God if he is aware of what's going on. He's asking how long this will go on unpunished. Habakkuk is an answer to the question of what God does with evil. Habakkuk asks the question: does God judge evil? The answer Habakkuk receives? Yes.

Outline:

- First Prayer and God's Answer (1:1-11)
 - o Habakkuk's Lament Regarding Judah's Wickedness (1:1-4)
 - Habakkuk asks how long will the Lord let this go?
 - o God's Response: Judgment is coming through Babylon (1:5-11)

- The Lord responds that he is doing a great work.
- Second Prayer and God's Answer (1:12-2:20)
 - Habakkuk's Questions Regarding God's Justice (1:12-17)
 - Habakkuk doesn't understand how Babylon is God's a part of great work, when they are even MORE evil than Judah.
 - God Instructs Habakkuk to Write Down What He Hears (2:1-4)
 - This is an important message. God's plan is in action, his word is sure and his judgment is coming.
 - Key verse: Righteous shall live by faith - Those who have faith in God will be preserved.
 - God's Answer to Habakkuk: Judgment on Babylon (2:5-20)
- Third Prayer and Habakkuk's Faith (3:1-19)
 - Habakkuk's Request for Mercy (3:1-2)
 - Habakkuk recognizes God's sovereign power to judge, and sees his need for mercy. He humbles himself and asks God for mercy
 - Habakkuk's Reflection on God's Sovereign Power to Deliver (3:3-15)
 - Habakkuk's Trust in God's Sovereignty (3:16-19)

Themes: The importance for God's people to reflect God's character. Future judgment of the wicked and salvation for the righteous. How God brings about that salvation in the promise of a new kingdom.

Timeless Application: Habakkuk chooses by the end of the book to trust God and live by faith amidst a dark, chaotic world. Habakkuk is a recognition that God loves this world more than we do and will purge it of evil. Habakkuk chooses then to continue to live by faith and call all those who live in a Babylon like country to do the same. Why? Because God promises in Habakkuk 3:3-15 that he will save his people and his anointed one. Those who find refuge in the Lord will be saved. Those who find refuge are those who continue to walk upright before God. When nations are corrupted and evil, God still holds them accountable for their actions and deeds, both individually and societally. God will not let one go unpunished, nor will he let one go unrewarded for walking with integrity. It is our responsibility then to walk in faith and integrity, trusting the sovereignty of God, that he will make all things right, even when we may not understand the answer that God provides.

Zephaniah

Historical Setting: Zephaniah is prophesying during King Josiah's reign, around 630 BC-590 BC and is a contemporary then of Habakkuk and Jeremiah. Josiah has faithfully led the people to follow the Lord, and yet, in spite of all of the reforms, God's wrath would not be turned away. There is some political upheaval happening between Egypt, Assyria and Babylon as the Assyrian dominance begins to rapidly crumble. Zephaniah is

displaying God's work in using the nations to accomplish his plans.

Central Message: Zephaniah's message is that the Day of the Lord is coming, and that at this point, repentance would not delay or stop it, but may save through it. Zephaniah calls on the humble to pray for the Lord's mercy.

Outline:

- Judgment (1:1-3:8)
 - Warning of universal Judgment (1:1-3)
 - Judgment against Judah and Jerusalem (1:4-13)
 - The Day of the Lord (1:14-2:15)
 - Judgment against the Philistines
 - Judgment against Moab and Ammon
 - Judgment against Cush
 - Judgment against Assyria
 - Judgment against Judea and Jerusalem (3:1-7)
 - Warning of Universal Judgment (3:8)
- Restoration (3:9-20)
 - Judgment for the purpose of purification and restoration (9-13)
 - The Lord will establish a kingdom (13-20)

Themes: The importance for God's people to reflect God's character. Future judgment of the wicked and salvation for the righteous. How God brings about that salvation in the promise of a new kingdom.

Timeless Application: The main theme through the book of Zephaniah is that God judges to bring about righteousness. He is holy and cannot stand sin. Therefore, he must punish sin, but it's not simply an angry or vengeful wrath that God pours out. It is a loving merciful wrath, that displays his compassion as he shows mercy on a remnant and saves even in the midst of judgment people from all nations, who will come to him in humility and repent of their sin. It ultimately points to a day of the Lord where God will purify all sin from the world and establish his kingdom. The application for us is to consider our actions in light of the day of the Lord. What is it that we are looking to, who are we turning to, what are we trusting in?