

Note: Course resources utilized included NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible notes, ESV Bible and ESV Study Bible notes, John Sailhamer's Pentateuch as a Narrative, Stephen Dempster's Dominion and Dynasty, Tom Schreiner's The King in His Beauty, Carson, Moo, and Naselli's Introducing the New Testament, T. Desmond's Alexander's From Paradise to the Promised Land, Carson, Moo, and Morris Introduction to the New Testament, The Gospel According to John by D.A. Carson from the Pillar New Testament Series, The Letters of John by Colin G. Kruse from the Pillar New Testament Series, Bethlehem College and Seminary Old and New Testament Survey, Thirdmill.org website and others (TGC and TGC Online Commentaries).

Introduction

The Prophets are perhaps one of the least understood and most neglected sections of the entire Old Testament, and maybe even our entire Bible. These portions of Scripture contain some things that are hard to understand- and are prone to be mishandled by not a few Bible interpreters.

Add to this the fact that the task of interpreting and understanding the prophets is not an easy one. Each prophet ministers within a unique set of historical circumstances- the prophets often have different target audiences, they speak using different types of oracles, they speak messages of lawsuit, judgment, woe, oracles against the nations as well as messages of salvation- all while using a divinely inspired poetry.

The prophets experience different visions, and their message does not unfold in a nice, neat linear chronological timeline like the narrative portions of the Old Testament do by and large.

Some of the prophets' ministries overlap, while other prophets' ministries are separated by well over one hundred years.

The Minor Prophets, our focus for today, receive even less attention than the Major Prophets, and this makes their content even less familiar to us.

As you undertake a reading of the Minor Prophets- you quickly get something of the flavor of their content- as you are faced with an abundance of "judgment language" that seems to repeat. Interspersed among an abundance of judgment language are messages of hope, salvation, and restoration. This can cause the casual reader to feel disoriented and unclear as to what the heart and essence of the Prophet's message really is. So it is not always easy.

Another difficulty for the modern readers of the Prophets arises from an inaccurate understanding of the word "prophecy." For most people, this word conveys the idea of "foretelling or prediction of what is to come." As a result, some Christians think of the Prophetic Books as a large collection of predictions about the coming of Jesus and/or certain features of the New Covenant. There is no doubt that the prophets did indeed announce the future. There is no doubt that some of these announcements are

messianic and have in view the distant future and the new covenant age. But these features occupy a very small percentage of their words.

I have seen this breakdown before- less than 2 percent of Old Testament prophecy is messianic. Less than 5 percent specifically describes the New Covenant age. Less than 1 percent concerns events yet to come in our time.

What the Prophets usually had in view were concerns that were relatively more immediate. And much of their future-oriented, predictive words have already been fulfilled.

Moreover, as we shall see, their ministry was largely a ministry, not of foretelling, not of warning or describing future events. Rather their ministry was one of forthtelling- telling it like it is to the people who heard their words.

And finally, there is the problem of historical distance. We are a people far removed from the religious, historical, and cultural life of ancient Israel, so it can be difficult to place the words spoken by the prophets in their original historical context. It is often hard for us to see what they are referring to and why.

However, despite the apparent difficulties in understanding the prophets- I want to assure us that their message *can be understood* and their message remains relevant. But we must work at it a little bit. And that is what this morning is all about.

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Most of you sitting here this morning are familiar with at least some of the key passages in the Prophets, especially from the Major Prophets. For instance, this time of year we often encounter the words of Isaiah 9.6- For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

There are other Scriptures from the Major Prophets that we are quite familiar with, and derive a tremendous amount of comfort from. For instance, the promises of the New Covenant contained in Ezekiel and Jeremiah. The prophecy concerning the Suffering Servant contained Isaiah.

Many precious truths that you are familiar with find their source in the Minor Prophets as well. For instance, the words of Paul in Romans 1.17 as he references the message of the gospel- "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." This is drawn from Habakkuk 2.4. This text is also the source for Paul's words in Galatians 3.11- Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith."

Or take for instance Romans 9.26- “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’” which is drawn from Hosea 1.10.

Therefore the Minor Prophets are not so minor. In fact, the designation- “Minor Prophets” refers to their collective and individual brevity- their short length relatively speaking when compared to the likes of Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel. The description “Minor Prophets” has absolutely no bearing on their significance within the canon of Scripture, or the importance of their content.

At this point, I would like to talk about *the Minor Prophets as a unified-collective work.*

I think it is helpful to know that ancient Judaism grouped these 12 Minor Prophets into one large book, called “The Book of the Twelve,” or simply “The Twelve.” There is good reason to believe that this collective composition was intentional- as we step back and consider the Twelve as a whole, we can appreciate this theological and literary unity that connects them- a unity that serves to amplify the message of each particular prophet. Within the 12 books, we see recurring themes and even catchwords that link one book to the next in their respective order.

For instance-Hosea’s presents this vision of fruitfulness, horticultural blessing, and future restoration-

Hosea 14:4–9-

[5](#) I will be like the dew to Israel;
 he shall blossom like the lily;
 he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon;
[6](#) his shoots shall spread out;
 his beauty shall be like the olive,
 and his fragrance like Lebanon.
[7](#) They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow;
 they shall flourish like the grain;
 they shall blossom like the vine;
 their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.
[8](#) O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols?
 It is I who answer and look after you.^c
 I am like an evergreen cypress;
 from me comes your fruit.

And in the very next book, Joel brings a message of judgment, painting a picture, not of agricultural blessing, but rather destruction, by means of a locust plague.

Joel 1:4

4 What the cutting locust left,
the swarming locust has eaten.
What the swarming locust left,
the hopping locust has eaten,
and what the hopping locust left,
the destroying locust has eaten.

Joel goes on to describe the Lord as “roaring from Zion” against the nations and in defense of his people.

Joel 3:16

The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake. But the LORD is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.

As Amos opens, the very next book- we see the Lord “roaring from Zion” in judgment against his people- since they have acted more treacherously than the surrounding nations.

Amos 1:2

“The LORD roars from Zion
and utters his voice from Jerusalem;
the pastures of the shepherds mourn,
and the top of Carmel withers.”

And there are many other features like these connecting the Twelve.

So there is strong textual evidence that suggests the Twelve form this collective whole, beginning with Hosea and ending with Malachi.

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Let’s shift gears for a moment, and address the historical contexts surrounding the Minor Prophets.

Context is always a primary consideration when seeking to understand a passage or verse or book of the Bible. And context is especially important when wrestling through the prophets.

Our first task is to appreciate the historical circumstances in which they spoke the words of God- essentially their place within the history of Israel and Judah.

And here is the reason why- the words of the prophets are not historical narrative in and of themselves, with perhaps the exception of the short account of Jonah.

Rather they are like a divinely inspired commentary on what has taken place within the historical narrative- especially the books of Kings and Chronicles. Like a divinely inspired commentary, the words of the prophets give us greater depth of insight as to why things played out the way they did within those historical narrative portions of Scripture- why things played out the way they did among the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and among the surrounding nation, and when the people returned from exile.

As you read through the prophetic books, you will notice that many of the books have superscriptions as they open- words that help orient the reader to the historical setting within which the prophet ministered. Hosea, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah provide us with such historical references.

However- Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Malachi do not supply us with these helpful superscriptions. So we must determine their historical setting through carefully studying their content. Historical references and allusions within these books generally provide adequate clues for establishing their historical setting, with the exception of Joel and Obadiah. These are prophets whose precise historical context remain somewhat obscure. Nevertheless, their message can still be understood.

These prophets, who were spokespersons for God- speaking God's message and not their own, preached during a period that spanned more than three centuries, from approximately 780 to 420 BC.

Broadly speaking- there are three sets of historical circumstances that occupied center stage during the prophets' ministries.

First there was the Assyrian conquest of Samaria and the subsequent exile of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC.

Every king from the northern kingdom, Israel, was ungodly, worshiping at altars forbidden by the Torah. The nation experienced some political highs and lows, but the Lord's word of judgment was inevitable. God determined to use the armies of Assyria to bring judgment against his people. Therefore, in 722 BC the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom and exiled the people.

The prophets Hosea (750–715 BC), Amos (760–750 BC), Micah (735–690 BC), and Jonah (785–775 BC) are set within the Assyrian Period while Nahum (650–630 BC) bridges the gap between Assyrian and the forthcoming Babylonian dominance.

Secondly, there is the Babylonian conquest of the Southern kingdom, the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the people of Judah to Babylon in 586 BC.

Mind you, several of Judah's kings, who were from the line of David, were devoted to the Lord. And the history of the Southern kingdom was not nearly as bleak as the Northern kingdom.

And yet the kingdom's overall trajectory was still downward, and Judah followed Israel's steps and rebelled against the Lord's commands and God's word of judgment was unleashed on Judah as well. God used the Babylonians to bring judgment against the Southern Kingdom of Judah in 586 B.C.

Zephaniah (630–620 BC) and Habakkuk (620 BC) would prophesy during the impending Babylonian exile.

And finally, there is the time following exile- in 539 and 538 B.C. when the people of God were permitted to return to the land. Initially, a small number of Jews returned to the land under the leadership of Zerubbabel, who was a descendant of David, in addition to Joshua the high priest. Haggai (520 BC) and Zechariah (520–518 BC) speak to the first generation of returnees out of exile from Babylon, and with the encouragement of their prophetic ministry, the temple was rebuilt in 520-515 B.C-

Despite this relatively positive beginning for the restored community, by the time Ezra and Nehemiah stepped on the scene, false religion had taken root among the returnees. In this context Malachi (450-430 BC) ministered, calling a generation of God's people established in the land to repentance.

And again- Joel and Obadiah remaining ambiguous in the timeline of the Twelve.

Prophet	Audience	Time Period	Notable Feature
Hosea	Israel	760–730 B.C.	<i>Hosea was commanded to marry a prostitute as a symbol of God's union with an unfaithful Israel.</i>
Joel	<i>Judah</i>	600 B.C.?	<i>Joel used a locust plague to remind Judah of a coming day of judgment.</i>
Amos	Israel	760 B.C.	Amos condemned Israel primarily for their lack of concern for social justice.
Obadiah	Judah; Edom	586 B.C.?	<i>Obadiah confronted Edom, a pagan nation, who was oppressing the people of Judah.</i>
Jonah	<i>Israel</i>	770 B.C.	Jonah narrates a story with a theological point rather than providing a collection of oracles.
Micah	Judah	737–690 B.C.	<i>His prophecies diverted an Assyrian attack on Jerusalem in 701 B.C.</i>
Nahum	<i>Judah; Assyria</i>	650 B.C.	<i>Nahum offered hope to Judah by proclaiming the destruction of Assyria, the current world power.</i>
Habakkuk	Judah; Babylon	630 B.C.	Habakkuk addressed God, not people, wanting answers for how he could judge Judah with the more evil Babylonians.
Zephaniah	<i>Judah</i>	627 B.C.	Zephaniah spoke about the Day of Yahweh on which Judah's idolatry would be judged.
Haggai	<i>Judah</i>	520 B.C.	Haggai encouraged the rebuilding of the temple in order to usher in the fulfillment of the restoration promises.
Zechariah	Judah	520–518 B.C.	<i>Like Haggai, Zechariah encouraged the rebuilding of the temple in order to usher in the fulfillment of the restoration promises.</i>
Malachi	Judah	450 B.C.	<i>Malachi sought to revive God's people who had forgotten their identity by warning of the Day of Yahweh.</i>

When it comes to the finer points of dealing with the context, this will be something that you will likely have to refresh yourself on as you read through these books. A reliable study Bible rooted in solid evangelical scholarship can be very helpful. I am not going to belabor the fine points this morning. Just know that there is some leg work and that is okay.

But what I want to do instead is paint a picture of the historical context with very broad strokes. And I think this will help you understand the prophets in general, and the minor prophets in particular, just a little bit better.

Historically speaking, in order to understand the prophets, we must look back at the inception of the nation of Israel. After redeeming His people from Egyptian bondage- God made a covenant with Israel through Moses on Mt. Sinai. Here God instructed his people how they were to live life in the Promised Land. As the Israelites obeyed God's law, they would reflect and image his character to the nations by the way they lived under his Lordship- subsequently the nations would then know that the Lord alone is God. If Israel kept God's statutes and laws, they would experience blessing. If they broke covenant with Him, they would experience the covenant curses. We can boil down and summarize the covenant relationship between Israel and Yahweh in two requirements: (1) love the Lord your God, and (2) love your neighbor as yourself.

But over and over again- Israel violated the covenant by not loving God. Rather, they engaged in idolatry- the worship of other gods. They also violated the covenant by not loving their neighbor as oneself. The nation was characterized by social injustice- the harsh treatment of one's neighbor.

Therefore- God sent the Prophets- spokesmen for God. A prophet was God's "mouth" as it were. In Exodus 4.16, The Lord told Moses that Aaron would be "a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God"- and later described this arrangement in this way: "Aaron your brother shall be your prophet" (Exod. 7:1). To be a prophet was to speak authoritatively on behalf of God.

It was very important for God's people to distinguish between true and false prophets. The test of a true prophet was threefold: he had to be an Israelite ([Deut. 18:15](#)); he had to be loyal to the covenant mediated by Moses ([Deut. 13:1-5](#)); his predictions had to come to pass ([Deut. 18:21-22](#)). Bear in mind that not everything true prophets said about the future would necessarily take place. Prophets often spoke to motivate rather than to prognosticate. They frequently announced future judgments as threats, not as absolutely certain and inescapable condemnations, and the prophets would speak of future blessings as offers, not sure promises that would be fulfilled. Make no mistake- if the prophets disclosed what amounted to an eternal decree of God in their predictions, their prophecies would come to pass without fail. So we have to listen to the text. We

must always ask how the prophets intended their predictions to be taken. What level of divine determination did the prophet's words indicate? Did the prophet mean for his prediction to be taken as conditional or inevitable? We must not lose sight of God's intention in his words through the prophets.

The job of God's prophets, in view of the covenant at Sinai, was to confront God's people about their covenant unfaithfulness, their covenant breaking and call them back to a right relationship with God.

They were what we might describe as covenant enforcers or covenant prosecutors.

Their assessment of the people was not based on their impressions. The actions and lives of kings and peoples were held against the Mosaic covenant- the words, instruction, demands, and stipulations of God in his law were the touchstone- the measure of whether or not God's people were living the way God intended (Jer. 11:6–11; Hosea 6:7; 8:1).

As covenant enforcers, covenant prosecutors- the prophets would bring charges or covenant lawsuits against Israel and Judah because they broke the covenant.

In this capacity, the prophets would also warn the people of the covenant curses. This was a conspicuous feature of their ministry. The prophets would also call the people back to covenant faithfulness. And- the prophets promised restoration of covenant blessings for those who would repent and turn to the Lord.

We see this role of covenant prosecutor played out in Hosea 4 where the prophet says that the Lord has a “controversy,” in other words- a lawsuit against his people-

Hosea 4:1 (ESV):

1 Hear the word of the Lord, O children of Israel, for the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land.

In the very next verse, Hosea 4.2, the nature of Israel's transgression is clearly articulated. Hosea holds the nation up against the Ten Commandments, the covenant- namely the second tablet of the law, saying-

Hosea 4:2 (ESV): there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed- each infraction echoes the Ten Commandments given in the Mosaic Covenant.

A few verses latter Hosea explains that the people had “forgotten the law of [their] God” (4:6), and “like Adam they transgressed the covenant” (6:7).

We see a similar covenant lawsuit in Micah 6.

Micah 6:1–2 (ESV):

Hear what the Lord says:

Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice.

2 Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the Lord, and you enduring foundations of the earth, for the Lord has an indictment against his people, and he will contend with Israel.

Here the Lord calls upon the mountains and the hills to hear his case, his indictment, against his people. The Lord had only done good for his people by freeing them from slavery in Egypt and providing for their every need. But Israel forsook the justice, mercy, and kindness required by the law and they refused to walk humbly with God (v. 8).

And many other texts in the Prophets fit this pattern, even if explicit lawsuit language isn't used by the prophet.

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*But let's go deeper with this. On one level we can talk about broken laws and a broken covenant. But implicit in all of this is a broken **relationship**. I cannot emphasize that enough. So often we miss this all-important implication when we talk about the nation's iniquity, transgression, and sin. We can be blind to what our sin truly looks like in God's sight. We can be blind to the true nature of sin.*

So God sends prophets- whose words pierce to the division of soul and spirit, joint and marrow, discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart. In doing so, the prophets would provide us with vivid and visceral depictions of how our sin grieves God.

Let's examine one of the most vivid depictions of sin found in the Minor Prophets, one that would set the tone for the rest of the Twelve.

The prophet Hosea was called by God to enter into a marriage relationship that was less than ideal- and what took place here was not normative. In obedience to God he *married* an unfaithful prostitute, in an effort to awaken the people of Israel from their idolatrous stupor and finally see the true nature of their covenant breaking.

Hosea 1:2–3 (ESV): the Lord said to Hosea, “Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord.” 3 So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

The Lord has always been Israel's faithful husband, however- Israel had been an adulterous wife, with this bent toward unfaithfulness- she was drawn to idolatry like a moth to a flame, and because of her idolatry, she was guilty of "whoredom by forsaking the LORD".

This description of Israel's sin- her worship of and her reliance on other gods (especially Baal worship) shows us that her transgression is not merely a failure to keep the demands and stipulations of the covenant. Israel is fundamentally guilty of treachery and betrayal. Moreover, Israel, the wife of Yahweh, did not appreciate the fact that it was the Lord who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished on her silver and gold. It was the Lord who gave her good gifts= gifts that Israel would turn around and employ in the worship Baal.

Soul searching, convicting analysis of the sin and iniquity, like this one, abound in the minor prophets-

For instance- Joel condemns Israel's ritualistic, outward show of religion- and therefore calls them to "rend your hearts and not your garments."

Amos condemns the affluent in Israel for selling- "the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals— 7 those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted- Amos 2:6–7 (ESV).

Micah marshalls a laundry list of sin aimed at those who oppress, false prophets, and the leaders of the people.

Habakkuk (1:2–4) cries out- 2O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear?

Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? 3Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. 4So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.

And as we approach the end of the book of the Twelve, even God graciously restores the people to the land, the people go back to their old ways.

Haggai reminds us that the people's priorities are wrong- instead of rebuilding the temple and serving the Lord, their priority is to serve themselves. Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? (1.4)

The Lord, through the prophet Zechariah- has to remind the people to “render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, [10](#) do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.” (7:9–10)

And the people's condition during the days of Malachi, as the canon comes to a close, are quite troubling . Among both the priests and the people there is unfaithfulness- irreverence (Mal. 1:6–14), corrupt teaching (2:1–9), divorce (2:10–16), hypocrisy (2:17), widespread immorality (3:5), absence of tithing (3:8–11), and religious skepticism (3:14–16).

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In light of these sins- the impending judgments announced by the prophets do not seem out of proportion.

For instance-

Hosea pronounces the impending judgment of God in how he names his three children.

The first child is named Jezreel. Jezreel is where cruel Jehu, an instrument of God's judgment, struck down all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, all his great men and his close friends and his priests, until he left him none remaining (2 Kgs. 10:1–10.)

The second and third child are named Lo-Ruhamah ('she does not obtain mercy') and Lo-Ammi ('not my people') (Hos. 1:3–9). And with each successive name, God's judgment appears more and more ominous- and declarations of judgment like these are found throughout the Minor Prophets

Nevertheless, in the Minor Prophets, we see time and time again that sin and judgment do not have the last word.

Consider Hosea once again, and God's response to Israel, as Hosea redeems his unfaithful wife-

Hosea 3:1 (ESV): 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.”

And then we read words like Hosea 11:8–9 (ESV): How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim?

My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. 9 I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.

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Clearly there is a tension here. A tension that can be seen and felt throughout the Minor Prophets- The Lord is simultaneously a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, *but who will by no means clear the guilty-*

The Lord is a God of compassion and mercy, but also a God of justice and wrath- whose "eyes are too pure to look on evil;" and he "cannot tolerate wrongdoing"- Habakkuk 1.13

We have a real tension here. Mercy and justice.

Where do we see these realities, mercy and justice, in perfect proportion, in such a way that doesn't result in our final condemnation for our sins? In such a way that guilty, condemned, rebels like ourselves escape the judgment and are made right with God? How can both of these things be true, that God can be merciful to sinners, and at the same time God not treat His holiness as a light thing, and compromise His perfect justice?

God is able to do what is humanly impossible. He has made a way to declare sinners righteous in his sight while remaining true to his unchangeable holy character. To punish sin while passing over and forgiving sin. This where the person and work of Christ comes in. Christ is God's answer to the tension and God's answer to the human predicament. Jesus becomes the sinner's representative and substitute in order to save sinners and give them a righteous standing before God. The eternal Son of God, fully divine, came into the world, adding to himself a human nature. Without laying aside his divinity, He became fully human. Christ's representative life and substitutionary sacrificial death satisfies God's righteous wrath toward sinners. He declares them to be righteous not because they are intrinsically righteous- but because God, in His wisdom, sends His Son to bear their sin and God's wrath in His own body on the cross. Christ's own righteousness God counts as theirs- and their sin He counts as Christ's. Because of these things, God relates to those who trust in him with divine favor. ***And God can be both just, and the one who justifies the ungodly.***

As sinful human beings, we ought to rejoice in God's mercy and tremble before God's justice. His justice forces us to take sin seriously; his mercy pardons us when we

fail and falter. And the Minor Prophets, in their own vivid and visceral way, constantly put the two realities before. And in Christ, we see how both can be true as God saves sinners like us from the wrath to come.

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There is another very important theme that we ought to cover in our survey of the Minor Prophets- something referred to as “The Day of Lord”.

As you read through the Minor Prophets, you will notice that it is a theme that surfaces again and again-

Sometimes the prophets refer to the Day of the Lord as “that day,” “the day,” “those days,” or the “latter days,” but the terms are all synonymous with the Day of the Lord.

The Day of the Lord, as it is announced by the prophets, was presented as a day of judgment but could also be presented as a day of hope.

{Throughout the Minor Prophets we see that the Day of the Lord can be applied to the immediate acts of God in judgment- (in other words the day would come to expression in the current historical context of the prophet). But the concept of the Day of the Lord could also be applied to eschatological realities of a coming judgment and restoration- acts of God yet to be fulfilled, that would take place in the distant future. The exact nature of the Day must be determined by context.}

Ultimately, what we see is that there are multiple manifestations of the Day of the Lord. Allow me to explain.

If you were living in the eighth century B.C., and heard Hosea or Isaiah’s message, you would hear about the Day of the Lord and the destruction it would bring.

And in 722 B.C., when the Assyrians invaded Israel, slaughtered men, women, and children, burned the capital city Samaria, and carried the survivors off to Assyria- you would have considered that entire event to be the promised Day of the Lord-

Isaiah 13:6 (ESV): Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come! Isaiah 13:9 (ESV): Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. Isaiah 13:13 (ESV): Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the Lord of hosts in the day of his fierce anger.

But then, if you were alive over a century later, you would have heard Jeremiah preaching about the Day of the Lord. So in 586 B.C. when the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem, slaughtered men, women, and children, burned the city, and carried the

survivors to Babylon- you would have considered that event to be the promised Day of the Lord.

Jeremiah 46:10

10 That day is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, to avenge himself on his foes. The sword shall devour and be sated and drink its fill of their blood. For the Lord GOD of hosts holds a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates.

In the time of Amos, the leadership of Israel expected the Day of the Lord to be a time of light (essentially a time of great blessing), but Amos warned this idolatrous kingdom that it was coming upon them as a day of darkness (Amos 5:18).

The prophet Joel proclaimed that a devastating locust plague was the Day of the Lord but there would be greater judgments beyond the locust plague, if the people would repent. And he foresaw (as only a prophet can) a future Day of the Lord when God would judge the nations in “the winepress of his wrath,” while also bringing about the final restoration of Israel “on that Day” (Joel 2:31; 3:1, 14).

Many, many years later, after God’s people returned from exile, prophets like Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi were still talking about the Day of Lord as this event that would take place in the future.

Malachi 4:1 (ESV): For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. Malachi 4:5 (ESV): 5 “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.

Clearly, there were multiple manifestations of the Day of the Lord.

In fact, New Testament apostles also said that **the ultimate** fulfillment of the Day of the Lord has yet to come-

1 Thessalonians 5:2 (ESV): 2 For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

2 Thessalonians 2:2 (ESV): do not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

2 Peter 3:10 (ESV): 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Therefore- this great Day is the day of Christ's second coming. Just like it was in the prophets, it is simultaneously a day of judgment and a great day of salvation- for those who cling to Christ by faith.

So remember as you read the minor Prophets, the theme of the Day of the Lord threads its way through the books- and is portrayed as a time when God intervenes into the affairs of man- bringing to bear His judgment and bringing about His salvation. And now we await the ultimate day of the Lord.

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We have talked about how the Minor Prophets relate to the covenant, covenant breaking, the true nature of sin, judgment and mercy, and the day of the Lord, a day where judgment and salvation come together.

Finally there is one other matter that the Minor Prophets address- and that is the restoration and renewal of all things. There is some doom and gloom in the Minor Prophets, but make no mistake, these books hold out hope for transformation- a new world is promised after the judgment.

For instance, as we read on in Hosea, we see that the three children see a reversal of circumstances. Jezreel is no longer associated with bloodletting, treachery, and judgment but is associated with being sown into the land, God will sow Israelites back into the land by bringing them up from exile once again (Hos. 1:11 and 2:2). 'She who is not loved' (Lo-Ruhamah) becomes 'She who is loved' (Ruhamah), and 'He who is not my people' (Lo-Ammi), becomes 'My people' (Ammi), as Israelites become as numerous as the sand on the seashore. The Valley of Achor, a notorious place of judgment and curse, will become a door of hope, and a new type of Noahic covenant will be made, which will renew nature and society.

In Joel, the earth is renewed so that mountains drip with wine and hills with milk, while rivers of water flood all the valleys of Judah.

The same imagery is used in Amos for the renewal of nature (Amos 9:13–14).

Micah speaks of the fruitfulness of the land, as the people beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks (Mic. 4:1–5)

Haggai and Zechariah speak of the renewal of nature, and the temple will be at the heart of such renewal, radiating holiness to the land (Zech. 14:20–21).

Amid the glorious renewal and restoration, a Davidic king arises to fulfill these restoration promises. Early within the collection of the Twelve a new “head” is promised for Israel, “David their king” (Hos 1:11; 3:5).

Hosea 3:5- Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

With his ascension, the “tabernacle of David,” would be rebuilt, and the fortunes of the people restored (Amos 9:11–15).

Like the former David, this future ruler would come from Bethlehem, shepherding the flock of Israel- Micah 5:2 But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

After the exile is complete- the Minor Prophets continue with these messianic expectations-

Haggai makes it clear that the appointment of Zerubbabel as governor of Judah was proof of God’s commitment to restore the house of David- Zerubbabel was a descendant of King David (Hag 2:23). I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the LORD, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the LORD of hosts.” This has massive messianic overtones as the people await a coming king from the line of David.

Zechariah prophesies concerning the Davidic “Branch”-

6.12-13 Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD. [13](#)It is he who shall build the temple of the LORD and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.”

And so we see the throne and the priesthood converge- in anticipation of Christ who is both King and Priest.

And of course there are the messianic prophecies in Zechariah- that present the future Davidic king as a humble servant, riding on a donkey, speaking peace to the nations yet ruling with dominion “to the ends of the earth” (Zech 9:9–10). These prophecies anticipate the future Davidic messiah, with the New Testament making clear that these are fulfilled in the person of Christ (Matt 21:1–5; John 19:37).

True prophecy ceased in Israel about the time of Malachi. Three times the author of 1 Maccabees (4:46; 9:27; 14:41), which is on the whole a sober history of events during the Jewish revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes (c. 165 B.C.), said clearly that there was no prophet in Israel, and he implied that this had been true for a considerable length of time. 3RD

This intertestamental period of silence ended with the voice of John the Baptist who announced that God was about to establish his Kingdom ([Matt. 3:12](#); [Mark 1:3-8](#); [Luke 3:2-17](#)). Malachi ended Old Testament prophecy with a prediction that God would send a messenger, a new "Elijah," to prepare the way for the future coming of God to his people ([Mal. 3:1](#); [4:5](#)). The evangelists and Jesus identified John the Baptist as the Elijah foretold in Malachi ([Matt. 17:12-13](#)). Thus John opened a new day of prophecy - the day of the Kingdom of God in Christ. 3RD

The prophets spoke of a day when God's saving promises would be fulfilled, his kingdom would come, the new covenant would be inaugurated, a new and better exodus from Babylon would be realized, the Spirit would be poured out on Israel, and Israel would keep God's law. The prophets promised a new creation, a new temple, a new covenant, and a new king. The exile would finally be over, and the wilderness would bloom.

And as the Old Testament draws to a close- the exile is over. God's people, in measure, have returned to the land. But those promises I just mentioned- do not feel realized. The people still felt like exiles. In the first place, only a small number of Israelites made the journey back to the Land promised to their forefathers. Slowly, over the next several decades others would return. This was hardly a New and more glorious Exodus. The temple and city walls were rebuilt and a remnant was present- but it was a far cry from the promised restoration uttered by the prophet Isaiah. The foundations of the new temple brought tears to the eyes of the people, as the people reflected on the glory of a bygone era. God's presence had not returned to the temple. Israel was still under foreign rule. No Davidic King was on the throne. Most of the people of God were still scattered in foreign countries. Perhaps more importantly, the promise of a new heart and new spirit associated with a new covenant had not materialized. Those who were in the land continued to disregard God in significant ways. For all intents and purposes, Israel was in spiritual exile from God- still in spiritual bondage.

Eventually in the Second century B.C.- during the intertestamental period as it were, there was no prophet in Israel. At this time the Jews would find themselves embroiled in a fight with a dynasty called the Selucids, a pagan empire from the north. The King of the Selucids, Antiochus Epiphanes, decided he wanted to wipe out Jewish monotheism. He made monotheism a capital crime, Sabbath observance was a capital crime, temple worship much the same, a capital offense. Possessing portions of the OT scripture was a capital crime. This King occupied Jerusalem and began to offer pigs inside the rebuilt temple.

And up in the hill country of Judea an old man killed one of the Selucids' envoys. He was a priest. He had three sons. The oldest was named Judas, and he came to be known as Judas the hammer. In Aramaic- Judas Maccabeus.

Eventually he was killed, and his brother took over. That brother was killed and the next brother took over. And around this time was established one of the first guerilla forces we read of in history. Rumor has it that in some military schools around the world you still have to read Josephus the Historian in order to understand the battle tactics of these guerilla warriors.

Gradually, this militia grew in strength, and after about 3.5 years, a conflict erupted and the Jews won. This was 164 B.C. —

And for the first time in about 500 years, the Jews were free. Free to install whomever they wished upon the throne. Free from the oppression of foreign rule.

But was there a national repentance and turning to God? No. In obedience to the Scripture and by faith in the promises of God, was a Davidic king installed? No. The rebel leaders take the throne to themselves.

Years pass, and around 63 B.C. the Romans gain control. And though the Israelites are home, they are still in exile. Still oppressed. Still in bondage. The Romans swept in and subjugated Israel, appointing the Herodians and procurators to rule the land.

Is God's promise of a new Exodus, a new creation, a new temple, a new covenant, and a new king dead? No. There can be heard in the wilderness of Judea a lone voice being lifted up-

A voice of one calling:

“In the wilderness prepare

the way for the Lord;

make straight in the desert

a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be raised up,

every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.
5 And the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

And with those words, so begins the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

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And we will talk about that next week-

Let's pray.

The events that color in Israel's history make it perfectly clear. Bondage was never merely an oppressive regime. Bondage was not Roman rule. Bondage was rooted in sin, and death and the fear of death that came into existence because of our sin. It is bondage to sin and death and the fear of death that is our real issue.