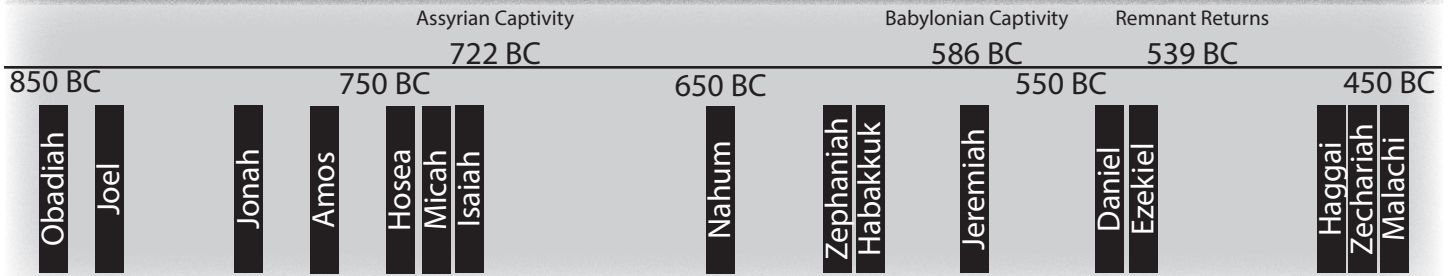


THE MINOR PROPHETS

WRITTEN BY:
CHARLES WILLIS

PROPHETS



DEFINE

What is the difference?

Seer

Prophets hold a unique place in God’s work. In a period of time when the people longed for a King to be like the nations around them, the prophet of God remained above the King’s authority. Only in the nation of Israel could a prophet like Nathan stand before the King and make accusations of his sin and not be put to death. The prophet was not always respected in Israel (such as Jeremiah), but when things worked as God intended, the prophet was an extremely important person.

Prophet

As God’s spokesman, the prophet in the Old Testament period often brought words of warnings or commands directly to the King. Too often these instructions directly opposed the thinking of the King. Many rejected the words of the prophet thereby rejecting God. This led to a downward spiral throughout the reign of the Kings of Judah. The prophets often forewarned of future events or prophesied of the Messiah and the nation of Judah. Some of the fulfillments of these prophecies are explained in the New Testament as in the example of Joel in Acts chapter two.

Sees Visions

Some read from the prophets desiring to see how their prophecies are fulfilled in our age. Instead we need to read the prophets understanding what was happening in their age. In this way we will discern proper applications from which we will benefit greatly.

The twelve minor prophets were written about 400 years before Christ under several different circumstances. They are called “minor” due to their length when compared with the “major” prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. It has no bearing on their content or importance. Their work was focused on the people at a time of Israel’s capture by the Assyrians (721 B.C.) through the time when Judah was led in the Babylonian captivity (586 B.C.) and to a period when the remnant returned to Jerusalem (450 B.C.).

The work of the prophets is summarized in 2 Kings 17:13 which says, “the Lord warned Israel and Judah through all His prophets and every seer, saying, turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments, My statutes according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you through My servants the prophets.”

UNDERSTANDING PROPHETS

1. What was the role of a prophet?

- A. 1 Chron. 29:29; 2 Chron. 9:29; 12:15; 13:22; 32:32; 33:19
- B. Deuteronomy 18:18-22; 1 Samuel 3:19-4:1; Micah 3:8

2. How did they know what to say?

- A. 2 Peter 1:20-21
- B. 1 Samuel 10:6, 10; 1 Samuel 19:18-24
- C. Exodus 7:1-2
- D. Numbers 12:4-10

3. What prophets do we know of but from whom we do not have a book?

- A. 2 Chronicles 15:1-2
- B. 2 Chronicles 19:1-3
- C. 2 Chronicles 20:14ff
- D. 2 Kings 22:14
- E. Others?

MODERN PROPHECY

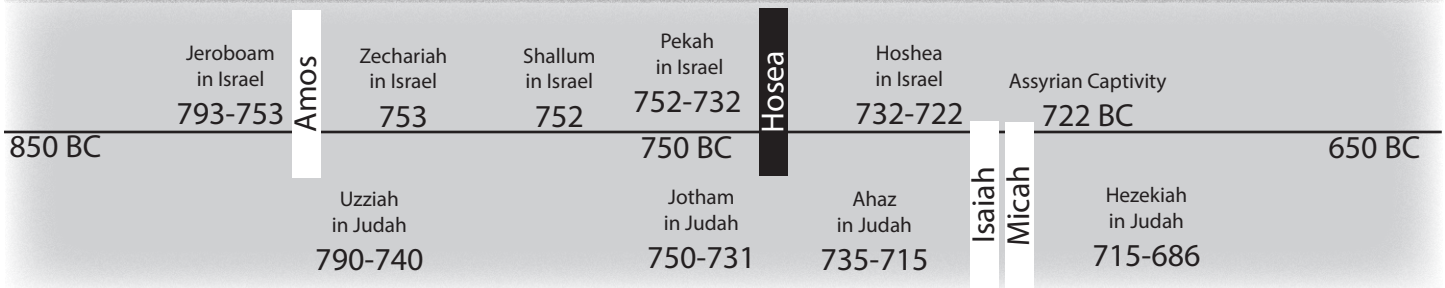
1. Do prophets of God function today? Why or why not? (1 Corinthians 13:8-13)

2. What differences do you see in “modern prophets” and the prophets we read about in the Old Testament?

3. Of what significance to the Jews was the lack of prophets from the time of Malachi to the time of John the Baptist (some 400 years)?

4. What was the role of prophets in the early church (1 Corinthians 14)?

HOSEA



FACTS

Read The Book
(14 Chapters)

Hosea means Help

Spoke to the northern
tribes of Israel.

He appears to have lived in
Israel rather than Judah.

The word of the Lord
came to him in the days of
Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and
Hezekiah, kings of Judah,
and during the days of
Jeroboam...king of Israel
(Hosea 1:1).

He seems to be a younger
contemporary with Amos,
whose work was confined
to the reign of Jeroboam.

At the beginning of Hosea's work the Northern Kingdom was enjoying prosperity and running to excess with the victories of Jeroboam II. The society had become corrupt with the worship of idols, many having been introduced by Ahab's wife Jezebel a few decades earlier. The sin of idolatry is described as whoredom.

There was not a single god named Baal. The word Baal roughly is translated lord. When the Israelites conquered Canaan they failed to drive the inhabitants completely out. They worshipped local deities and called all of them Baal followed by the location so we find Baal-hermon, Baal-gad, Baal-berith, and so forth. The Israelites apparently began worshipping these local idols, celebrating specific days to them and more. In many places this worship would have taken place at one of the "high places" throughout the region.

This came about because of an absence of knowledge (Hosea 4:1). This speaks of great religious ignorance. Parents had not taught their children. Priests had not taught the people. The Kings had not led the people in righteousness. The consequences are the same in the New Covenant where Paul wrote, "God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper" (Romans 1:28). Hosea 4:14 indicates the people were extremely involved in immorality.

No longer were the Israelites a peculiar people set apart for God. Rather they are condemned for mixing with the nations (Hosea 7:8). God promises they will reap the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7). The "grossness" of their iniquity (Hosea 9:7) leads God to say "all their evil is at Gilgal; indeed, I came to hate them there" (Hosea 9:15). Repeatedly God urges them to repent. He fondly remembers them from the past and is repulsed by their deep involvement in sin.

Hosea has many great applications for us. It is a book which reveals many attitudes about God and man. When man fails to adopt godly attitudes, Jehovah is justly angered over sin. I encourage you to read the entire book in one sitting if you have the time. It will give you a much better picture of the entire book and help you see more clearly the repeated concepts of God's attitudes and man's failings. Re-reading the book will of course help even more.

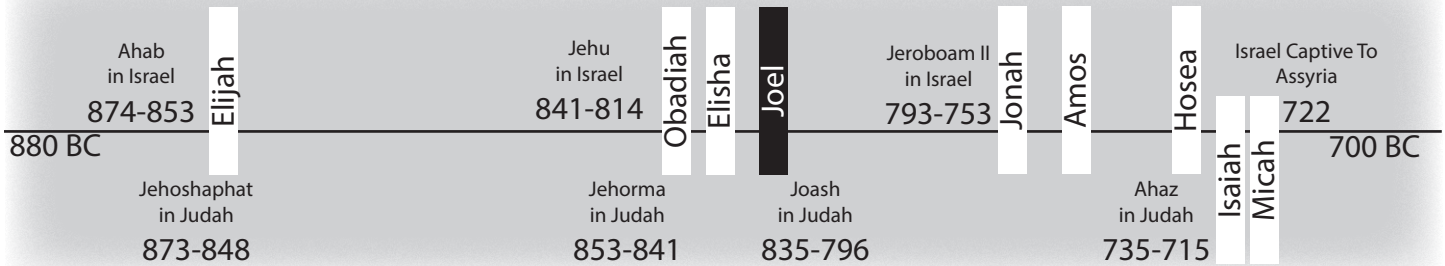
UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. How is the relationship between Hosea and Gomer an illustration of God's relationship to Israel?
2. Explain the prophecy in Hosea 1:10-2:1. Examine the use of this passage in Romans 9:25-26 and in 1 Peter 1:10.
3. Explain these illustrations:
 - A. A morning cloud and dew (Hosea 6:4)
 - B. A cake not turned (Hosea 7:8)
 - C. A silly dove (Hosea 7:11)
 - D. A deceitful bow (Hosea 7:16)
 - E. A trained heifer (Hosea 10:11)
4. What was the "bent" of the people (Hosea 11:7; 13:9)?
5. What is the last message conveyed (Hosea 14:9)?

APPLYING THE TEXT

1. What is the leading cause of Israel's sin (Hosea 4:1,6,14)? How can we be guilty of this same thing?
2. The people cried out "My God, we of Israel know You". What was God's attitude toward this mind-set (Hosea 8; 6:6-11)? How do we sometimes display this same attitude?
3. What message of hope does God repeatedly send Israel through Hosea? What is His message of hope to us?

JOEL



FACTS

Read The Book
(3 Chapters)

Joel means Jehovah is God

Spoke to southern tribes of Judah.

Appears to have lived in Judah, possible a native of Jerusalem (2:15, 23, 32; 3:1)

The time of Joel is not stated directly in the text, which has given rise to disagreement among scholars.

If an earlier date is taken, which is how I will address the book, Joel was a contemporary of Elisha. He labored during the reign of Joash in Judah, and into the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel.

Joel was from the southern nation of Judah. Some argue that he was a priest due to frequent references to the temple and the priesthood (1:13-17; 2:17). This can not be verified. Another point of contention among scholars is the date of the writing. Many point to a late date, after the Babylonian exile. Conservative critics point to an early date, which I tend to agree with; therefore, I propose to you some reasons why an early date should be accepted.

Joel worked during the reign of Joash in Judah about 830 B.C. The Jewish scroll of the prophets (from which we get all our books of prophecy) place Joel early in the sequence indicating their understanding of an early date for the writing. The fact that no king is mentioned, coupled with the importance placed on the priests, agrees with events in the time of Joash, the boy king. The enemies mentioned in the book are those of a time prior to the exile (Egyptians, Phoenicians, Edomites, Philistines) rather than after the exile (Babylonians, Persians, etc.).

Joel's message is one of repentance in order to escape the judgment of God in the "day of the Lord" (2:1). Imagery in the book is centered upon a locust plague, likely prompted by an actual plague upon the land. The plague and a drought (1:17ff) placed the people in great need physically. Joel warns of an even greater judgment that was coming (1:15; 2:31; 3:14). This judgment from God would come upon the people if they did not now recognize their great need spiritually. The locust plague was just a sample of the wrath of God that was coming.

If the people repented, they would escape God's wrath and the Lord would heal the land. More importantly, spiritual blessings would flow over them in the latter days when all flesh would see God pour forth His Spirit. Peter refers to the writing of Joel in Acts 2 pointing to the fulfillment of this prophecy in the apostles ability to speak in tongues. It is fulfilled in greater measure as the apostles laid hands on some conferring miraculous abilities in the church. For this reason Joel is sometimes called the prophet of Pentecost.

The theme of the book is the day of the Lord. The day of judgment will certainly come upon all those who do not obey Him. "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be delivered" (2:32). This is as strong a warning to God's people as can be found anywhere in Scripture. "The day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it?" (2:11).

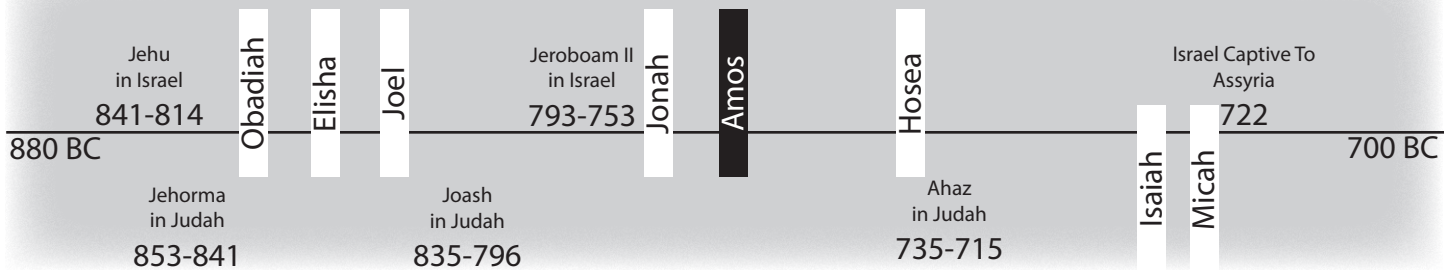
UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

- 1. What is the “day of the Lord” to which Joel refers? (1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14)**
 - A. Was this a single, particular day in the Old Testament period?
 - B. How does the New Testament use this concept? (Rom. 2:5-6; Rev. 6:17; 2 Pet. 3:12; Matt. 10:15; 2 Cor. 1:14)
- 2. What physical calamities are happening in Judah at the time of Joel (chapter 1)?**
- 3. What does God say will happen if the people repent (2:18-27)?**
- 4. What is meant when God says He will restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem (3:1)?**
- 5. What would happen to the enemies of God in the “day of the Lord” (chapter 3)?**

APPLYING THE TEXT

- 1. Compare the desolation of the locust plague (chapter 1) with the spiritual condition of Judah and of men today. Why does this illustration work so well?**
- 2. What is the true nature of repentance, as described in 2:12-13? What New Testament passages would teach the same truths?**
- 3. Discuss Peter’s application of Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:17-21. Include any false applications of Joel 2 that we might hear today.**
- 4. Relate the attitude of the people before the plague and compare this with the attitude of people at the coming of the day of the Lord (chapter 2).**

AMOS



FACTS

Read The Book
(9 Chapters)

Amos means Carrier, or
heavy, burden

Spoke mainly to the
Northern tribes of Israel,
but also to others.

He lived in Tekoa, just south
of Jerusalem, and travelled
to the north to deliver the
message of God.

Was not of a prophetic
school or a priestly line,
though prophets were
frequent at that time for
he writes, "Surely the Lord
God does nothing unless
He reveals His secret
counsel to His servants the
prophets" (3:7)

Amos was from Tekoa (1:1) which was about five miles south of Bethlehem. He was a "herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs" (7:14). He was not a priest and not of a prophetic line. He received a call from God to work in Israel at a time when Israel was deeply involved in idolatry.

Israel was prosperous at this time with many people living in luxury. The ease of life brought in a decay of morality and spirituality (6:1-6). In Bethel the people worshipped Jehovah and a calf. Jeroboam had established the idols after the break from the southern tribes, to encourage them to worship at the new "local" places rather than travelling to Jerusalem. He did not want them to be influenced by Rehoboam. The king in the time of Amos was Jeroboam II, and the practice of idolatry had long been established.

Because Amos spoke out about this abomination toward God and His ways, the priest of Bethel, Amaziah, sent word to Jeroboam saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is unable to endure all his words...Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and there do your prophesying..." (7:10-13). Amos responds that "Israel will certainly go from its land into exile" (7:17). The nation disappeared into the Assyrian captivity some twenty years after the prophecy of Amos.

The people considered themselves secure because they were God's children, His chosen ones. They worshipped Jehovah regularly, though they also participated in idolatry. In chapter five, God rejected their festivals, assemblies, and burnt offerings. "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (5:24). The first two chapters contain a judgment against Israel and her neighbors for their disregard of God's ways. Chapters three through six look at Israel's sins in more detail. Chapters seven through nine contain five visions of the coming judgment. All told, Amos paints a very bleak picture for Israel.

The people are not left without hope. "The day of the Lord draws near on all the nations...but on mount Zion there will be those who escape, and it will be holy..." (8:15-17). Seeing as we live in a culture that also trusts in their righteous standing before God but who also fail to live in righteousness, the prophecy of Amos has many parallels from which we need to learn.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. 2 Samuel 7:12-16 speaks of the kingdom that God established with the throne of David. How does Amos 9:11-15 speak of this fulfillment, and how is this referred to in Acts 15:14-18?
2. "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel" (4:12). What did they need to do to prepare? (See the context)
3. Why would God not accept their worship (5:21-27)? Why would He not accept ours?
4. Why did God change his mind (7:2)?
5. God said days are coming when He would send a famine "for hearing the words of the Lord" (8:11). Why do bad things sometimes happen to us?
6. What is meant by "I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob" (9:8)?
7. List the five visions (illustrations) related in chapters seven through nine which speak to God's judgment.
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.
 - D.
 - E.

APPLYING THE TEXT

1. Discuss how materialism was an issue for the Israelites (3:15-4:1; 5:12; 6:4-7; 8:4-6) and us. Include consideration for how materialism effects spirituality.
2. Can you compare Amos 5:14-15 with any New Testament passage or concept? Is this a message we should heed today?
3. God calls their sin "arrogance" (6:8). How is our sin arrogance?
4. How does God use a "plumb line" (7:7-8) to measure Christians today? What is the "plumb line"?

OBADIAH



FACTS

Read The Book
(1 Chapter)

Obadiah means
Worshipper of Yahweh, or
Servant of Yahweh

Spoke to the nation of
Edom

Believed to have been from
Judah based on verses 10-
12 and 17-21.

This is the shortest book
of prophecy in the Old
Testament.

The time of writing is
debated, but the early
date makes more sense.
He describes in verses
11-14 an attack on
Jerusalem, but it does not
seem to have completely
destroyed the city such as
was accomplished by the
Babylonians.

Though Obadiah is only twenty-one verses, it carries one of the strongest messages of judgment in the Old Testament. God pronounces His judgment on Edom through Obadiah. For Edom there were no requests for a return. There were no words to comfort them. There are no conditions given to bring about their deliverance from God's wrath. He would utterly destroy them. The book is about God's judgment on Edom (v.1-18) and God restoring the house of Judah (v.19-21).

We truly know nothing about Obadiah the man. There are a few Old Testament characters which bear this name, but there is no indication in the writing as to which might have authored the book. We know nothing of his hometown, or his life. All we are told is, "the vision of Obadiah" (v.1).

There is no mention of kings, nor of the years of their reign. There is no historical reference to aid in our understanding the specific time. There is a good bit of discussion about the invasion of Jerusalem (v.10-14) which leads biblical scholars to debate on which invasion is meant, for this would date the work. The most logical of these is an invasion during the reign of Jehoram in about 840 B.C. The Philistines and Arabians invaded Judah and looted the palace (2 Chron. 21:16-17). We also know that Edom revolted during the reign of Jehoram and became bitter against Judah (2 Kings 8:20ff; 2 Chron. 21:8ff). This well fits the descriptions of Obadiah.

As Jonah was a prophet to the Ninevites, Obadiah spoke to the Edomites. God never left people without an understanding of how to please Him. The Edomites were related to the Israelites, being the descendants of Esau. The disagreements between Jacob and Esau long out-lived them being perpetuated in their descendants. God now is going to bring this to a permanent end: "you will be cut off forever" (v.10).

The book of Obadiah is a rebuke against those who would stand by and take delight in the troubles that befall others. For this aloof and conceited attitude, the people of Edom are destroyed by God. What a dark and gloomy message of warning to us all.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. What reasons are given in the book for why God is going to destroy Edom? Try to list at least four.
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.
 - D.
2. What descriptions of Edom's demise are stated? Try to list at least three.
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.
3. Using a Bible dictionary or Bible encyclopedia, please identify "Teman" (v.9). Why is this name specifically mentioned?
4. Using a Bible Atlas, or a good map, try to locate the places mentioned in verses 19-21.
5. Of what importance is the phrase "For the Lord has spoken" (v.18)?
6. Which mountain will be the Lord's (v.21)?

APPLYING THE TEXT

1. Why does God send message of His judgment on Edom? Why not just send His prophets to the Israelites?
2. Please explain (again) the use of "the day of the Lord" (v.15). Relate how men today abuse this phrase.
3. Those who would profit from other's perils or do nothing while they are beat down are condemned in this book (especially v.12-14). Do any New Testament passages come to mind that teach this same principle?
4. Who would escape God's judgment (v.17)? What parallel teaching do you see for people today?

JONAH



FACTS

Read The Book
(4 Chapters)

Jonah means dove

Spoke to the city of
Ninevah and probably the
northern kingdom of Israel.

Believed to have been from
Israel, the town of
Gath-hepher
(2 Kings 14:25)

A contemporary of Hosea,
Amos and Micah.

His work is the only one of
all the minor prophets in
which miracles play a major
role.

Jonah is the only minor
prophet written as a
narrative of events.

Jonah prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II, who was King of Israel. 2 Kings 14:25 indicates God, through Jonah, had prophesied that Jeroboam II would restore the border of Israel. We learn that Jonah was active as a prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel, but his book has him prophesying to the capital of the Assyrian Empire.

The city of Ninevah was the most important city in the world at the time, as the Assyrians were the strongest nation. Jonah says the city was "a three days walk" (3:3) and had a population of more than 120,000 who did not know their right hand from their left, probably referring to children (4:11). A cylinder from King Sennacherib describes an expedition to Tarsus from Cilicia which states the circuit of the city measured 9300 cubits. He also claims to have enlarged the city by 12,515 cubits. Archaeologist G. Smith surveyed the walls of ancient Ninevah and found the southwestern wall to be 2.5 miles long, the northwestern wall was 1.3 miles long and the southeasterly wall ran 3.25 miles, joining the first wall with a smaller wall of about half a mile in length. This circumference is not a three days walk, however if locations are included outside the city walls (the suburbs), archaeological remains attest to the "exceedingly greatness" of the city which extended many miles.

As a people, the Assyrians were a militaristic society. Some refer to them as "brutes". They were enemies of all nations, including Israel. Jonah demonstrates a strong desire that they be destroyed. He does not want to see them repent. So strong was this feeling, he ran the opposite direction rather than carry God's message to them. Like many today, Jonah struggled to understand how Jerhovah could love these heathen, idol worshippers and desire to forgive them. God was making himself known outside the nation of the Israelites. He would save them if they would repent. Their salvation did not come through the Old Law (given through Moses), but through an observance of worship from the time of the Patriarchs.

The book serves as a strong lesson to Israel. The Ninevites repented and God spared them. Israel must also repent in order to please God. We know they did not and God allowed them to be taken into the Assyrian captivity, never to return as a nation. The proper attitude of heart is spotlighted in the book of Jonah. Even Jonah himself has trouble with correct attitudes, which God helps him see. The applications for us are numerous from the book, yet proper attitudes can be seen to be a primary lesson which we must also learn in order to please God.

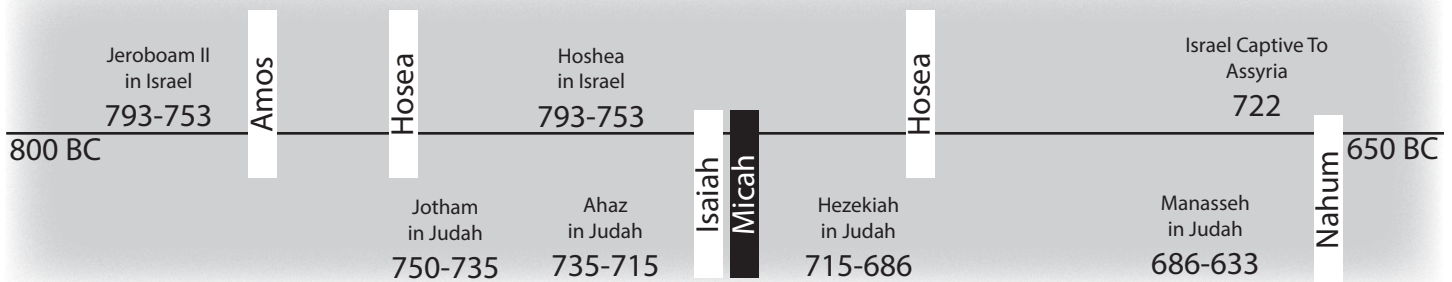
UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. Many scholars say Jonah is a book of fiction, an allegory. What did Jesus think of the book? (Matthew 12:39-41; 16:4; Luke 11:29-32)
2. What would you say is the theme of the book, the main message?
3. Jonah prophesied of the destruction of Ninevah, which did not happen. Is this an example of failed prophecy? (see also Jeremiah 18:5-10)
4. Convey Jonah's change of attitude while in the belly of the great fish.
5. Why might the people of Ninevah have believed in God (3:5)?
6. Why did Jonah become angry with God (4:1)?

APPLYING THE TEXT

1. Give two proofs from Jonah of how we cannot flee from the presence of the Lord.
2. How does this book demonstrate God's love for the lost?
3. As Jonah was God's messenger to the lost, we are messengers to the lost. What lessons are seen about what our attitude should be toward the lost?
4. Explain the reference to Jonah in Matthew 12:39-41.

MICAH



FACTS

Read The Book
(7 Chapters)

Micah is an abbreviated form of Micaiah which means 'who is like Jehovah'

Spoke to Samaria (the capital of Israel) and Jerusalem (the capital of Judah), but most of the message was directed toward Judah.

Believed to have been from Moresheth-gath, on the border of Judah and Palestine.

A contemporary of Isaiah

The wise men were guided to the birthplace of Jesus by Micah 5:2 (Matthew 2:5-6).

Micah prophesies during the reign of Jotham (739-735), Ahaz (735-715) and Hezekiah (715-686). Most consider his work of prophetic warning to have been prior to Hezekiah's reforms which corrected many of the things Micah speaks of (perhaps 734-700 BC). Many of the evils present in the nation of Judah are listed in the book of Micah: idolatry (1:7), covetousness (2:2), oppression (2:2), violence (3:10), encouraging false prophets (2:6-11), corruption of princes (3:1-3), corruption of prophets (3:5-7), corruption of priests (3:11), bribery (3:9) and dishonesty (6:10-11).

While great evil abounded in the land, the book of Micah emphasizes a lack of commitment from the people who possessed a double-minded heart. They served God observing feasts and sacrifices, but also idols at other times. There seemed to be no thought of God during the week between Sabbath days. Thus they were "religious" and "ungodly" at the same time. Micah strongly calls for the people to do what God says, and not merely profess to know Him (6:6-8). It is interesting to consider that the name Micah means 'who is like Jehovah', for that is a question the people need to see in themselves.

Micah 4:1ff is almost identical to Isaiah 2:2ff. Scholars are divided as to whether Micah or Isaiah or some older prophet was the original source that is quoted. Regardless, it is very interesting to note that two contemporary prophets brought the same message from God.

The book repeatedly speaks of God's displeasure, and the coming punishment for their sin. Chapters one and two refer to God's judgments. Chapters three to five contain judgments upon the rulers. Chapters six and seven call the people to repentance. Yet the book closes with an awesome affirmation of God's love. There is no God like Him "who pardons iniquity" (7:18). It can be difficult to see the love of God while studying the minor prophets for they seem to be full of God's anger and judgment. We must not lose sight of God's love in the repeated pleas for repentance which he sends to his people through these prophets.

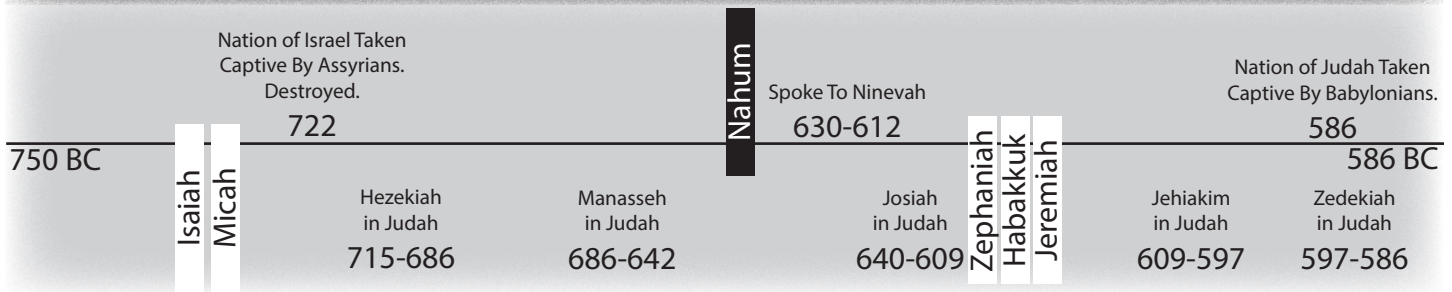
UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. Why was the Lord “coming forth from His place” (1:3-7)?
2. What were the prophets doing that led the people astray (3:5-12)?
3. Explain how 4:1-7 contains a prophecy about the coming church.
4. How does 5:2-5a refer to the Messiah?
5. What is meant by the “remnant of Jacob” (5:7-8)?
6. If “God is love” (1 John 4:8), how can he “execute vengeance in anger and wrath” (5:15)?

APPLYING THE TEXT

1. Describe how we today also offer service to God that is not acceptable (6:6-8). What does the Lord require today?
2. Do we wait on the Lord today (7:7-8)? What does this mean?
3. What attribute makes Jehovah different from idols (7:18-20)?
4. Discuss how these passages relate to the modern business environment in our society (6:10-12; 7:2-3).

NAHUM



FACTS

Read The Book
(3 Chapters)

Nahum means comforter. This name appears nowhere else in the Old Testament.

Spoke to Ninevah.

Nahum was from a small city of Elkosh (1:1) believed to have been a small village in Galilee, which would have been in the nation of Israel.

A contemporary of Zephaniah, Habakkuk and Jeremiah.

He worked some 150 years after Jonah spoke to Ninevah.

The central theme of the book of Nahum is the fall of Ninevah. It speaks of the destruction as a coming future event. From history we know Ninevah, the capital of the Assyrian empire, fell in 607-606 B.C., therefore this is the latest the book could have been written. Nahum 3:8 speaks of the capture of Na-amon as a fact. This was the Egyptian city of Thebes which Ashurbanipal, King of Assyria took in 663 B.C. The work of Nahum must have taken place between 663 B.C. and 607 B.C. Most scholars date the work between 630-612 B.C.

Nahum is strongly pointing out the hand of God in the coming fall of the city. It was not mere politics or natural events at work, God was bringing a judgment upon the city. Jonah went to Ninevah some 150 years earlier and the people repented. In Nahum's day, Ninevah was at the height of its glory as the Assyrian capital. It dripped of wealth, overflowed with pride, and was impenitent. God's time of grace was past. Nahum's message was not about repentance, but about God's vengeance and wrath (1:2). This judgment was a while in coming, so much so Nahum says, "The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished" (1:3).

Some struggle with the intense language of God's judgment expressed by Nahum. Some find it difficult to see God's love. Despite God's patience, He will not tolerate sin indefinitely. He "reserves wrath for His enemies" (1:2) and says "Behold, I am against you" (2:13, 3:5). The sin and impenitent attitude resulted in God's destruction of the city. We are not reading of Nahum's personal joy in their overthrow, but we do read of a righteous indignation against the wicked. His was a passionate hatred for those who stood opposed to God.

In the Hebrew, Nahum is a poem. It is a superb and wonderful example of Hebrew literature. It is rhythmical and majestic in force. There is a clarity of style and diction which is not surpassed in Hebrew writing. These attributes make Nahum stand out as unique. Throughout the book God's existence, justice and providence are asserted.

The downfall of Ninevah was accomplished by the Medes and Chaldeans who faced them as a mutual enemy. These were God's instruments in bringing about His judgment on the wickedness of men. A few years later, Ezekiel attests to the fall where the citizens were killed by the sword (32:22-23).

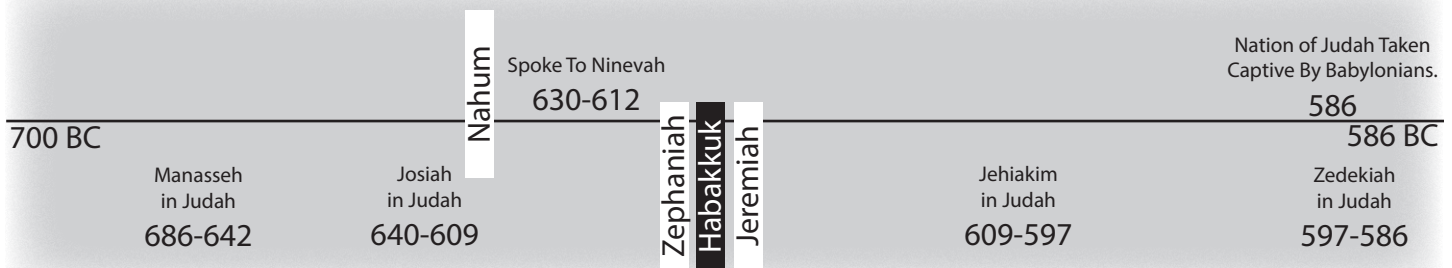
UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. What message about God is given which should cause men to more carefully consider God's words? (1:1-6)
2. Explain the contrast found in 1:7-8.
3. 1:12-15 is a message addressed to Judah. What is the "yoke bar" and "shackles" which the Lord was going to remove?
4. What does Nahum foretell will happen to the wealth of Ninevah (2:8-10)?
5. Explain the symbolism of "lions" given in 2:11-13 and "locusts" given in 3:15-17.
6. Make a list of some of the sins for which Ninevah is being punished (chapter 3).
7. What will be the attitude of others about the destruction of Ninevah (3:19)?

APPLYING THE TEXT

1. Jealousy, vengeance and wrath are all expressed as attitudes of God (1:2). With the thoughts of Ninevah's destruction in mind, make a comparison to the destruction of the wicked from Hebrews 10:26-31.
2. "Behold, I am against you" (2:13, 3:5) says God. Romans 8:31 says "if God be for us who can be against us". This implies God is not for everyone - a concept some in denominationalism reject. What New Testament passage(s) would teach of God being against some today? Why is He against some?

HABAKKUK



FACTS

Read The Book
(3 Chapters)

Habakkuk means embrace
or one who is embracing.

He spoke to God on behalf
of the people of Judah. He
recorded God's vision for
Judah. This is unique in the
messages of the prophets.

A contemporary of
Zephaniah and Jeremiah.

Chapter 3 is basically a
psalm. A unique form
of writing to the minor
prophets. 3:1 refers to a
"Shigionoth" which is a
word seen in the title of
Psalm 7 and is generally
taken to mean 'rhapsody'.

Nahum spoke of the destruction of the Assyrians and their capital of Ninevah. By the time of Habakkuk, that had taken place for 1:6 says God was raising up the Chaldeans. This is the rise of the Babylonian empire which in a few years would destroy Jerusalem and take the Judeans into captivity. Historically we know this change in power took place in 612 B.C. We also know from 3:16 that the Chaldeans had not yet invaded Judea which occurred in 605 B.C. Therefore the book is dated between 612-605 B.C.

Habakkuk begins in a very unusual way, the only similar writing being found in Job. Rather than warning the people of God about their sin, Habakkuk questions God. He could see iniquity and wickedness, violence and strife (1:3). The reforms of King Josiah (640-609 B.C.) did not last with the people. They soon returned to idolatry. The abuses of the kings and priests spoken of plainly in Jeremiah are here indicated by Habakkuk, his contemporary. Corruption was rampant in Judea. "Therefore the Law is ignored" (1:4). Habakkuk saw that the righteous were outnumbered by the unrighteous (1:4). He asks God how long will you not hear and not save the faithful (1:1)? There is some back and forth conversation in the first two chapters which reveals God is going to use the Chaldeans in Habakkuk's day (1:5). Because of this phrase many believe (as I do) that Habakkuk witnessed the Babylonian captivity along with Jeremiah. Habaakuk pleads with God on behalf of the righteous.

Habaakuk demonstrates a great faith in God (1:12) in that he says the righteous would not die. He asserts the Chaldeans were God's chosen instrument to bring a judgment on the wickedness of His people. Yet he questions how God could use such evil people to bring about His will when He is pure and holy (1:13). It appears from God's response that Habakkuk was giving voice to the thoughts of many of the righteous in Judea for he is told to "record the vision" (2:2). Chapter two is God's message to the righteous.

Chapter three is Habakkuk's reply of trust and confidence in God. He has enough evidence to convince him, which is enough to convince any man of righteousness. Through all the coming conflicts and destruction Habakkuk states "Yet I will exult in the Lord. I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength" (3:18-19).

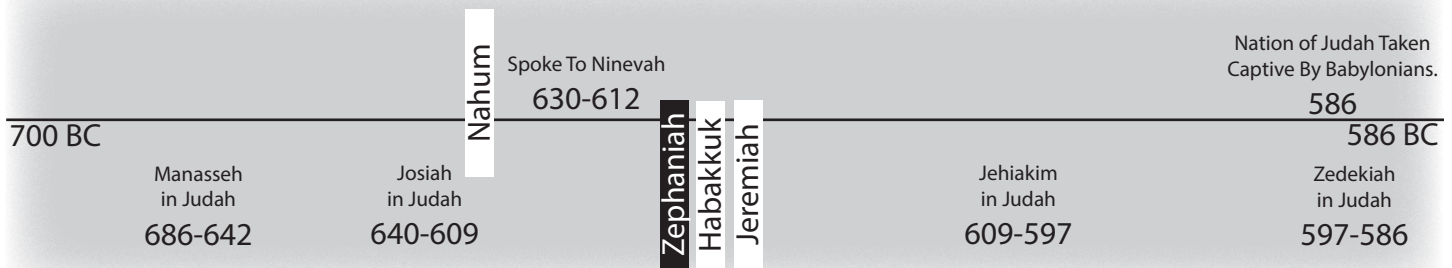
UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. What was the god of the Chaldeans (1:11)? What was God's attitude about this? Do men serve this God today?
2. Explain the figure of the Chaldean's "fishing nets" given in 1:14-17.
3. What does God say about the proud one (2:4-5)?
4. List the four "woe's" pronounced by God in chapter two on the Chaldeans.
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.
 - D.
5. Explain the phrase "In wrath remember mercy" (3:2).
6. Who is meant by God's "anointed" (3:13)?

APPLYING THE TEXT

1. God's response to Habakkuk about the use of the Chaldeans is a strong statement. What does God say (2:4)? How does this compare with Paul's use of this quotation in Galatians 3:11?
2. God says there is no profit in worshipping an idol. In context how does this magnify the importance of 2:20? Why should all the earth be silent before Him?
3. Habakkuk said "the Lord God is my strength". How was He a strength to Habbakuk (3:19)? How is He our strength?

ZEPHANIAH



FACTS

Read The Book
(3 Chapters)

Zephaniah means Jehovah hides, or he whom Jehovah has hidden.

He wrote to Judah.

He is believed to have been from Jerusalem (1:4; 3:1ff).

He spoke to a corrupt nation just prior to the spiritual reforms of King Josiah, and may have been to a large extent the impetus of the reforms.

The theme of the book is the judgment of God. After this coming judgment the people would be purified and stand holy before Him. There is a looking forward to the promised remnant which occurred under Zerubbabel and Ezra.

Very little is known about Zephaniah. In an unusual and untypical fashion we are told of his family lineage that goes back four generations. It would be typical to be known as the son of Cushi, but not for four generations back. It is most likely this is done to connect him back to Hezekiah, his great-great grandfather. This is most likely the good king Hezekiah who ruled over Judah during the days of Isaiah and Micah. If this were the King Hezekiah, then Zephaniah was not just a prophet, but also a prince. Beyond his lineage, nothing is known about his occupation or personal history.

Zephaniah prophesied in the days of Josiah, 640-609 B.C. (v.1). Because of the state of sinfulness to which he refers, most place Zephaniah at the beginning of the reign of Josiah. He would have been a contemporary of Jeremiah, who also started prophesying in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah.

The book is obviously about the judgment of God. It begins with a judgment upon the whole world, idolators and especially Judah for its sin. Throughout he exhorts the people to repent and tells the righteous to persevere. He then gives a more pronounced judgment upon the surrounding nations of the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Ethiopians and Assyrians. In Jerusalem, all the princes, prophets and judges will be punished for their sin. This judgment of God will be a purging of sin so that He will "leave among you a humble and lowly people" who will take refuge in the name of the Lord (3:12). The book then goes on to describe the Messianic time when "The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst" (3:15) who will "save the lame and gather the outcast" (3:19).

One of the unique features of the book of Zephaniah is all that is said to the surrounding nations. The judgment upon Jerusalem is almost cursory in comparison. He spends a lot of time relating their destruction and future condition. He speaks of how they will bring about the will of God.

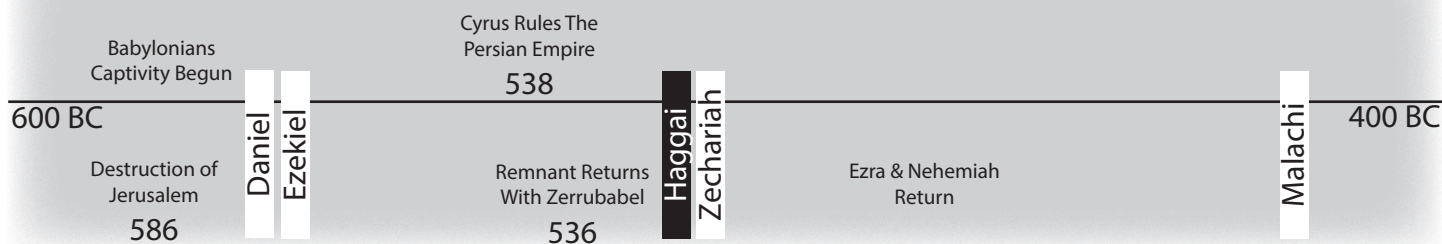
UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. The “great day of the Lord” is described in detail. What day is this speaking of? (1:7-18)
2. Make a list of the sins of Judah for which they were being punished.
3. What are the faithful told to seek (2:3)? Why?
4. What will happen to the surrounding nations as God judges them (2:4-15)?
5. What phrases or statements does God make indicating His desire for Jerusalem to repent (3:7-11)?
6. In the midst of a book about God’s judgment, 3:14 stands out. Why are the people told to rejoice?
7. What statements in 3:14-20 seem to apply to the Messiah or the time of Christ?

APPLYING THE TEXT

1. Who today would say, “The Lord will not do good or evil” (1:12)? How do we respond to such a mind set?
2. Based on Zephaniah 3:1-2...
 - A. Tell how these phrases describe our modern society.
 - B. What traits do these phrases indicate we must possess to please God?
3. Compare some in the Lord’s Church who promote error with those described in 3:4. What will be their result?

HAGGAI



FACTS

Read The Book
(2 Chapters)

Haggai means “festival” or
“festival of Jehovah”

He spoke to the remnant of
Judah that returned from
the Babylonian captivity.

It is unknown if he was
born in captivity or was
originally from Judah.

Haggai’s work was
accomplished in a brief
period of time, perhaps just
four months
(1:1; 2:1; 2:10; 2:20).

Haggai was perhaps a
contemporary of Daniel
and Ezekiel who both
wrote to the exiled
Jews in Babylon. He
was a contemporary of
Zechariah.

Little is known about Haggai, merely being mentioned in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14. He had lived in Babylon and returned with the first group of the remnant which was led by Zerubbabel (1:1). Where Zephaniah had prophesied an inescapable judgment to come, Haggai has lived past that judgment which was carried out by the Babylonians. At this point Jerusalem is a pile of debris. The temple of Jehovah was leveled. Cyrus of Persia had captured the city of Babylon and had a gracious attitude toward the Jews issuing a decree allowing them to return to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. (2 Chron. 36 and Ezra 1). About forty thousand made the initial return with Zerubbabel.

The foundation for the temple in Jerusalem was accomplished shortly after their return, but work stopped at that point. The people grew fearful of the threats from the people around them. The people lived in Jerusalem with no temple for fifteen or sixteen years, until Haggai and Zechariah began their work. The people were poor and the land had not been worked. The city had no walls and the other cities of Judah lay in ruins. The people in the region were hostile toward the Jews. At the time Haggai spoke, the people of God were dis-spirited and living in poverty.

Haggai had basically one message: rebuild the temple (1:8). Repeatedly in the book he demonstrates the people’s lack of success is because of their indifference in finishing the temple (1:10, 11; 2:16-19). Haggai repeatedly indicated his Divine message by saying “declares the Lord” more than a dozen times. His message was thus authoritative.

The people responded well to the message, showing reverence to the Lord (1:12). The people gathered and worked on the temple (1:13). Chapter two finds God encouraging the people, assuring them that God was with them. He also warns them to have a correct heart, for at the moment they were unclean (2:14). As they had changed their hearts, the blessings from God would be theirs in the future (2:19).

The last message (2:20-23) is Messianic in nature. God indicates that Zerubbabel is his chosen one. He was the first ruler of the restored Israel, and a descendant of David. Herein we hear an echo of God’s promise to Abram that through his seed all nations of the earth will be blessed (Gen. 12:3). So Zerubbabel was made like a signet ring, God’s chosen one. He is listed in the lineage of Christ (Matt. 1:12; Luke 1:32-33).

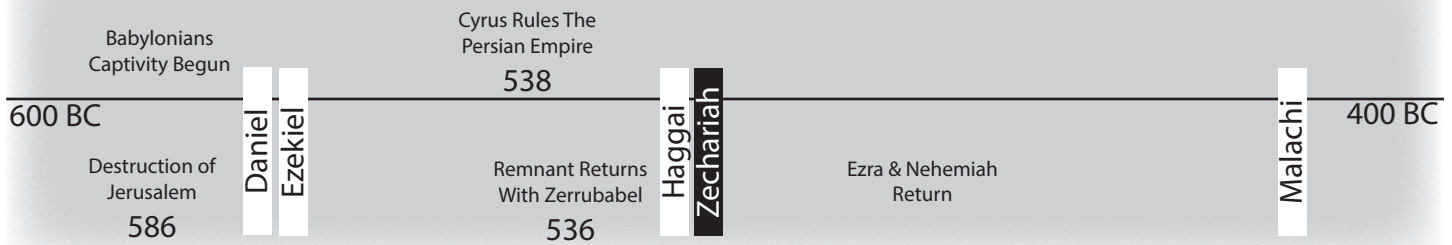
UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. Though the people recognized the temple needed to be rebuilt (1:2), why did they not rebuild it?
2. God emphasized the people lived in “paneled” houses. What does this indicate?
3. How had God been working to change the heart of the people prior to Haggai’s message (1:9-11; 2:15-19)? Does God operate that way today?
4. How did the people show reverence for the Lord (1:12)? What was God’s attitude (1:13; 2:4-9, 19)?
5. The Lord stirred up the spirits of the people (1:14) through Haggai. How does God stir up our spirit?
6. Why is the Messianic prophecy about Zerubbabel important?

APPLYING THE TEXT

1. 1:4 indicates an attitude of selfishness which existed in the heart of the people. When this is present in Christians today, how does it impact the Lord’s Church?
2. God told the people to “consider your ways” (1:5; 1:7). Provide three ways in which we would do well to “consider our ways”.
3. Discuss the type of message Haggai brought to the people. What type of preaching would this be (based on 2 Timothy 4:2)? Discuss the need for this kind of preaching today.

ZECHARIAH



FACTS

Read The Book
(14 Chapters)

Zechariah means “Jehovah remembers” or “whom Jehovah remembers”

“God Remembers” is the theme of the book. Israel will be blessed because God remembers the covenant.

He spoke to the remnant of Judah that returned from the Babylonian captivity.

Zechariah was a younger contemporary of Haggai.

There is a lot of apocalyptic writing in the book which makes this harder to read.

This is the longest book of the minor prophets.

Zechariah was of a priestly lineage being the son of Berechiah and grandson of Iddo (1:1m7; Ezra 5:1; 6:14; Neh. 12:4,16). He was born in the Babylonian captivity and was brought to Jerusalem by his grandfather when Zerubbable led the remnant out of Babylon. Zechariah would have been a young man as indicated in 2:4 while Haggai, his contemporary, would have been much older. He was called to prophesy some two months after Haggai began. Where Haggai’s message lasted just a few months, Zechariah worked for about two years.

Zechariah is the most difficult to read of all the minor prophets, undoubtedly because of the use of the apocalyptic style of Hebrew writing. There are many visions full of apocalyptic imagery seen throughout that style of writing. It is helpful to keep in mind that the message of Zechariah was primarily a message of encouragement. There are calls for revival and repentance, but Zechariah seems to take a more positive approach than did Haggai. God’s triumph would certainly take place. They were to remember that the temple they were building was not just for them, but was to be a place used the coming Messiah.

The first eight chapters were written to encourage the remnant while the temple was being completed. The last six chapters anticipate the coming Messiah. This makes Zechariah the most Messianic writing of the minor prophets. The book is generally divided as: the eight visions (1-6), fasting (7-8) and prophecies on nations (9-14). This last section speaks of the conflict between Jerusalem and the surrounding nations. It points strongly to the coming Messiah.

Two good verses which sum up the book are helpful in keeping our minds focused as we read through the apocalyptic imagery. “Thus says the Lord, I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain” (8:3). “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (9:9).

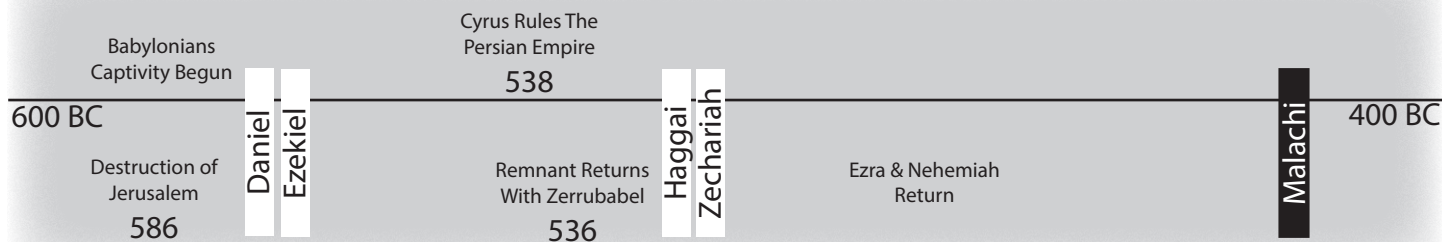
UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. What is apocalyptic literature? (Use a Bible dictionary if you need help)
2. "Return to Me... that I may return to you" (1:3). What principles of repentance and drawing near to God does this passage state? Provide New Testament references to support your answer.
3. From chapters 1-6, create a list of the eight visions given. If you can, give an explanation for each.
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.
 - D.
 - E.
 - F.
 - G.
 - H.
4. Name three points God makes through the use of shepherding in chapter 11.

APPLYING THE TEXT

1. What message did God give the people about fasting (chapters 7-8)? How does this apply to our New Testament worship?
2. 13:1 speaks of a fountain being opened for sin and for impurity. How does John 4:7-26 teach this truth for us today? (see also Zechariah 14:8 and Revelation 22:17)
3. Give the significance of 11:12-13. How does the New Testament validate Zechariah as an inspired text?

MALACHI



FACTS

Read The Book
(4 Chapters)

Malachi means "My
Messenger".

Malachi wrote to the
Jews in Jerusalem about
the time of Nehemiah,
sometime between 445
and 425 B.C.

A description of specific
sins is given, as well as
admonishment to turn
away.

The people had become so
sinful that God's message
had little to no impact.

After Malachi there was a
400 year silence when no
prophet of God spoke to
the people.

After hearing the prophecies of those who had gone before, we would think the prophecy of Malachi would have been well received. He speaks plainly and openly of their sin. There is no imagery such as is found in Zechariah. Straight forward confrontation of sin abounds in this book, yet the people did not respond in repentance.

The message was brought to the Jews in the time of Nehemiah. The people had been in Jerusalem about one hundred years after their return from Babylon. The Temple had been rebuilt as had the wall around the city. The physical things were repaired, yet the spiritual state of God's people remained broken. Malachi's message is all about renewal and commitment. The promised prosperity had not yet come and the Jews thought it was not worth serving God.

The state of affairs was awful. The priests had horrible attitudes about serving God in righteousness, especially in the administration of sacrifices. For this God curses the priests (2:2). It is of no surprise that the people began turning to idols for the priests were not stopping them. Their attitudes became so lax that divorces were permitted and tithes and offerings were neglected (3:6-12). God said, "you are robbing me, the whole nation of you" (3:9). So poor was their attitude they began to think it vain (useless) to serve Jehovah (3:14). While it may be difficult to understand how God's children reached this state, we can certainly see many of the attitudes that exist in the world today, as well as some attitudes within the church.

Not everyone held these views (3:16-18), yet it was enough of the Jews for God to send Malachi with this message: "the day is coming..." (4:1). The warning of judgment is strongly emphasized for the unfaithful, which is also a word of comfort to those who feared His name (4:2). The letter closes with a great prophecy of Christ and "Elijah" who would come before Him (4:5).

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. How were the priests and the people dishonoring God (1:6ff)?
2. "How tiresome it is". What was "tiresome" to the priests and people? What does it mean to "disdainfully sniff" at something (1:13)?
3. What does God say when comparing the current disposition of the priests with His covenant with Levi (2:1-9)?
4. Why were they weeping and groaning at the alter (2:13, see also 3:11-12)?
5. What language does God use in describing divorce (2:14-16)?
6. Who would be like "a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap" (3:2)? Please explain the meaning of these two illustrations.
7. Why would God's judgment be swift on the "widow and the orphan" (3:5)?
8. Who did God call "Mine" (3:16-18)?
9. How will the Jew's hearts be restored (4:4-6)?

APPLYING THE TEXT

1. How might we dishonor God today with our sacrifices (1:6ff)?
2. God would not accept their offering (1:10). Discuss how we can be deceived into thinking we are pleasing God when He really is not accepting our worship.
3. How might we "weary" God (2:17)?
4. Discuss how some today exhibit the same attitude as expressed in 3:14-15.