

Session 8: Minor Prophet I

Jonah, Obadiah, Nahum, Daniel, Joel, Baruch

Minor Prophets:

The distinction between the major and minor prophets is largely inconsequential. The major prophets are those prophets whose books contain a lot of text – Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah. The minor prophets are those prophets who have much smaller texts – Amos, Hosea, Jonah, Obadiah, Nahum, Daniel, Joel, Baruch, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Micah, Habakkuk, Malachi, Haggai. One the major differences between the major and minor prophets is the amount of biographical information about the prophet given either in the text itself or inferred from the text. Another major difference between the two groups of prophetic texts is the span of history or information they cover. The major prophets focus almost exclusively on the Babylonian exile and the events leading up to it, involving it, and preceding it. The minor prophets, in contrast, are much more diverse. Joel, Zephaniah and Daniel are all unique texts. Unlike the other prophetic books, they are apocalyptic literature, much like the book of Revelation.

Jonah:

The Book of Jonah is one of the strangest of the prophetic texts. Some scholars prefer to group this book with the wisdom literature as opposed to the prophetic books because its style is unlike those of the prophetic books. Unlike the prophetic books, the book of Jonah has no oracles, visions, or prophecies. In addition to the lack of common prophetic material it reads more like a story. The prophet Jonah is sent to the Babylonian capital of Nineveh. Since he does not like the heathen city of Nineveh, he rebels against God (a common response of the prophets) and travels to Tarshish. God has other plans for Jonah so he sends a storm that threatens the lives of the crew. In desperation and by Jonah's request, they throw him overboard and the storm stops. After journeying to Nineveh by giant fish, Jonah preaches repentance to the people who eagerly repent. Stunned by the level of repentance, Jonah sulks that God will save the city.

Outline:

- I. Jonah's journey to Nineveh (1-2)
 - a. Jonah's mission (1:1-3a)
 - b. Jonah flees (1:3b)
 - c. Storm at sea (1:4-16)
 - d. Jonah is swallowed by a fish (2:1-2)
 - e. Jonah's prayer while in the fish (2:3-11)
 - f. Jonah reaches Nineveh (2:11)
- II. Jonah in Nineveh (3)
 - a. Jonah preaches (3:1-5)
 - b. Nineveh repents (3:6-10)
- III. Jonah's anger (4)
 - a. Jonah vents his anger (4:1-4)
 - b. Jonah prays for death (4:5-8)

c. God's response to Jonah (4:9-11)

Passages:

Jonah 1:1-3

A common response of a prophet to God's call is to rebel in some way. Either the prophet can contend with God saying that he is not worthy (Isaiah) or not old enough (Jeremiah) or he can simply flee like Jonah. The rebellion of the prophets shows the difficulty of accepting God's call and completing his work. Basically, no one wants to be a prophet.

Jonah 3:6-10

Details are very important in Scripture. On the one hand they help to explain the passage and the context of the passage. On the other hand, like in this passage, the details seem to add a new character to the story. After Jonah preaches for one day in a city three times larger than the space he covered, the entire city repents: the people and the animals wear ashes and sack cloth, and refuse to eat. These details are slightly humorous.

Jonah 4:9-11

The theme of God's forgiveness and mercy reaching beyond Israelite society and the Jewish people will continue to expand throughout the prophetic texts. This passage exemplifies the deep tension and divide that exists between the people understanding that they are the chosen ones and set apart and God's mercy extending to all people.

Nahum:

The only information we have about the book of Nahum comes at the beginning of the book: "Oracle about Nineveh." Remember: Nineveh is the capital of the Assyrian empire, the first empire to attack Israel and Judah and sent the northern kingdom into exile. Therefore, the setting of this book is before the Assyrians have conquered the land of Israel, and before the exile. This text is odd in that, unlike the other prophetic texts, the oracles are not about the Israelites or Judahites. Instead, the oracles are spoken against the city of Nineveh.

Outline:

- I. Oracle against Nineveh (1:1-3:19)
 - a. The judgement of the Lord against Nineveh (1:2—2:1,3)
 - b. The Fall of Nineveh (2:2-14)
 - c. The ruin of Nineveh (3)

Passages:

Nahum 3:1-7

What are the problems of Nineveh? Bloodshed, prostitution, destruction of many other nations, witchcraft. Notice also the way that God will punish the Assyrians: "I will show your nakedness to the nations/ to the kingdoms your shame!/ I will cast filth upon you,/ disgrace you and put you to shame" (Nahum 3:5b-6).

Nahum 2:1 &3

The bringer of good news. This phrase means something rather specific in the minds of the ancient people. The “bringer of good news” or “the bringer of peace” is a person who has returned from the battlefield and announced to the people that they were victorious in battle. Since the armies were victorious, the people can now be at peace because the long-fought war is over and that country will no longer attack them.

Obadiah:

The Book of the Prophet Obadiah is much like the prophet Nahum in that the focus of the book is not of the crimes or transgression of the Israelite peoples but a condemnation of Edom. This incredibly small book has little information that helps us to understand the context or the focus of the book. We know nothing of the origins of the prophet Obadiah or from where he was preaching. What we do know, however, is that the Edomites fled their land and settled in the southern region of Judah in the fifth century BCE. Thus tensions arose between the Judahites and the Edomites.

Outline:

- I. Condemnation of Edom and oracle of its destruction (2-9)
- II. Transgressions of Edom (10-14)
- III. Imminent judgment of Edom (15-16)
- IV. Restoration of Judah (17-21)

Obadiah 1:10-12

This passage isolates the cause of the oracle of condemnation and sets the historical setting for this book.

Baruch:

The Book of the Prophet Baruch gives us some clues about the prophet, unlike many of the other prophetic texts. Baruch was writing to the exiles who were in Babylon around the same time that the Chaldeans took Jerusalem and burnt the temple. Baruch is the secretary of the Prophet Jeremiah. As a scribe we can assume his ability to write, which is evident in this book. The opening and closing parts of this book are in prose and the middle chunk is written poetically.

Outline:

- I. The Exiles (1:1—3:8)
 - a. The people in Babylon and introduction (1:1-12)
 - b. Prayer to God for removal of guilt (1:13—2:10)
 - c. Prayer for deliverance (2:11-26)
 - d. Recalling of God’s promises (2:27—3:8)
- II. Praise of the Law (3:9—4:4)
- III. Consoling the captives (4:5-29)
- IV. End of captivity predicted (4:30—5:9)

V. Jeremiah's letter against idolatry (6)

Apocalyptic Literature:

The books of Joel, Daniel, and Zephaniah are all considered apocalyptic literature. The only example in the New Testament is the Book of Revelation. Most people associate apocalyptic literature and events with a doom and gloom, end-of-the world, kind of mentality. True apocalyptic literature has little do-to with this mentality. The word apocalyptic comes from two Greek words, apo, up or above, and kaleo, to see or reveal. Therefore the word apocalyptic means to unveil or reveal. The focus of all biblical apocalyptic literature is the return of God and the restoration of the world. The most common phrase used in apocalyptic literature of the prophetic texts is "the day of the Lord." This phrase is specific to that day when the Lord returns and establishes and/or restores everything that had been lost.

Joel:

The book of Joel is a good example of this style of book in the minor prophets. The minor prophets give us very few clues regarding their origins, places of prophesy, or their credibility as prophets. The prophet Joel gives us only one clue that relates to his leanings: "and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat" (Joel 4:2). King Jehoshaphat was king of Judah and considered one of the good kings. If he is king and pronouncing judgement on the nations, Joel is probably preaching to the north and during a time before the exile, while King Jehoshaphat was king. Another detail about this text is its lack of stories or narrative. The minor prophetic texts commonly contain far more oracles or prophecies than narrative.

Outline:

- I. First section of oracles (1:1-2:17)
 - a. Prediction of the invasion (1:2-12)
 - b. Call to repentance (1:13-20)
 - c. Prediction of the return of the Lord (2:1-17)
- II. The Lord relents (2:18-4:21)
 - a. The Lord chooses not to punish the people (2:19b—3:5)
 - b. Final judgement and salvation (4)

Passages:**Joel 4:1-3**

This passage contains some of the only references to the historical time period or the events surrounding these oracles. The only context that we have to base these oracles on is the kingship of Jehoshaphat and the impending destruction of the people and land.

Joel 2:1-3

"The Day of the Lord" The phrase, "the day of the Lord", refers to the moment when the Lord will return and restore all of the people back to their land, the proper forms of worship, and reestablish himself as their God. This notion is emphasized in apocalyptic literature more than in

the other prophetic texts. As mentioned in the introduction, every prophetic text has some section related to the restoration of Israel. The Book of Joel has two major sections related to this event, chapter 2 and chapter 4.

Daniel:

The Book of the Prophet Daniel is one of the clearest examples of apocalyptic literature of the Old Testament. For this reason this book is read during the final weeks of Ordinary Time leading up to the Feast of Christ the King in year 1. The setting of this book is in city of Shinar in the land of Babylon during the Babylonian exile. Therefore we know that the people mentioned in this book are nobles who were exiled and forced to adopt the pagan customs of the Babylonians. The style of this book is markedly different from the other books of the Old Testament. Many of the passages are visions or oracles, which more closely resembles the end of the Book of Genesis than any other book. The vision are foresights into the future: the future destruction of Babylon, the future restoration of Israel, the future end of exile and captivity.

Although the Book of the Prophet Daniel is seen as one text, one book, the stories function better as a compilation of texts. Modern biblical scholars agree that the Book of Daniel consists of three main stories: Daniel and the story in Babylon, the story of Susanna, and then the story often called Bel and the Dragon or Daniel and Cyrus of Persia. The first story focuses on Daniel and his friends who are exiles in Babylon. These three men rise to power because of God's blessing upon them. The next two stories, Susanna and Bel and the Dragon, are very different in content and context from the story of Daniel. Susanna is about a woman who was accused of adultery but then Daniel proves her innocent since he is a wise man. Bel and the Dragon is the story of our hero, Daniel, surviving being thrown to the lions. The Church accepted these two parts of the Book of Daniel as Scripture even though they were not written in Hebrew and probably written closer to the time of Jesus than the life of Daniel. Protestants largely removed these parts from the Book of Daniel as they were not found in the Hebrew canon of Scripture.

Outline:

- I. Daniel (1:1-6:29)
 - a. Introductory notes (1:1-2)
 - b. Daniel is put to the test (1:3-21)
 - c. The kings dream (2)
 - d. Daniel's infidelity to the king was discovered and sentenced to death (3:1-97)
 - e. Visions of Nebuchadnezzar (3:98—4:34)
 - f. King Belshazzar and the writing on the wall (5:1—6:1)
 - g. Daniel thrown in the lion's den (6:2-29)
- II. Daniel's visions (7-12)
 - a. Vision of the four beasts (7)
 - b. Vision of the ram and he-goat (8)
 - c. Prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem (9)
 - d. Prediction of the war with Persia (10-12)
- III. Susanna (13)

IV. Daniel and King Cyrus of Persia (14)

Passages:

Daniel 2:36-45

The interpretation of the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel 7:9-10; 13-14; 23-27

This passage is a good example of apocalyptic literature. All apocalyptic literature has an element of mystery or an indescribable quality to it. In this passage the Ancient One is the God of Israel. The phrase "Son of Man" means a human being, i.e. one born from a human. The number 10 is twice of 5, which represents the law or the 10 commandments, the perfection of the law. One year, two years, and a half year equals 3 and half which is half of seven. Seven represents perfection therefore half of seven is highly imperfect.