

Session 9: Minor Prophets II

Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah, Malachi, Micah

Micah

The Book of the Prophet Micah is characteristic of prophetic literature. The purpose of a prophet was to call out the infidelities of the people and direct them back to God. Thus, this book is full of social critiques and expressions of God's divine judgement. The opening verses of the book contain the historical background for the Prophet Micah: "in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, kings of Judah...[the vision] concerning Samaria and Jerusalem" (Micah 1:1). Micah in prophesizing to both the inhabitants of Samaria and Jerusalem prior to the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem but after the Assyrians conquered the northern lands. Micah foresees the return of those who conquered the northern lands and the infidelities that led to that outcome as the same issues facing Judah.

Outline:

- I. Social Critique (1-3)
 - a. God's judgment on the nations (1:2-16)
 - b. Social evils (2)
 - c. Predicted downfall (3)
- II. Restoration (4-5)
 - a. The people will be restored (4:1-13)
 - b. Prediction of the Messiah (4:14—5:14)
- III. God's judgment portrayed in prophesy (6-7)

Passages:

Micah 2

These verses reiterate many of the themes we saw in the books of the law.

Micah 6

This passage is a wonderful display of the judgement of God. It plays with many notions common to both the prophetic books and the wisdom books: God is God and I am not. Who is greater than God? Whom can contend with God?

Habakkuk

Habakkuk prophesized during the destruction of Jerusalem and the beginning of the Babylonian captivity. Much of this book is written in the style of a prayer. The first three chapters lament the destruction of Jerusalem and question the will of God. The last chapter is a prayer of ascent to the will of God. The core message of this book is that God's ways are not our way, but that God will never depart from his people.

Outline:

- I. Habakkuk's prayer of complaint (1:2—2:20)
- II. "Canticle" of Habakkuk (3:2-19)

Passage:

Habakkuk 1:2-4

The opening passages to this book isolate and help us to imagine the destruction and chaos that the Babylonians caused through their destruction of Jerusalem. The destruction of the city was only one part of the lament of the people. Habakkuk, and the Book of Lamentations, provide us a window into the key emotions and the distress of the people.

Habakkuk 3:2-19

This chapter is also called "Habakkuk's canticle." The reason for this particular name is the little notes at the beginning and end of the chapter that indicate a metrical style for these verses. The focus of this passage is on fidelity to God amidst the darkness of loss.

Zephaniah

The genera of the Book of the Prophet Zephaniah is apocalyptic literature. As I mentioned in the last session, the focus of apocalyptic literature is not on the destruction of the world, final judgement, or a cataclysmic end but on the revelation of the glory of God to the world. Therefore we must read this book in light of the revelation of God: what will that moment be like? How will God manifest himself?

Outline:

- I. Introductory notes (1:1)
- II. The Day of the Lord (1:2-18)
- III. Judgement of the Nations (2:1-15)
- IV. Promise for Jerusalem (3:1-20)

Passages:

Zephaniah 1:2-8

The final revelation of God to the world and the restoration of his people comes at quite a cost. In order for peace to reign and God to have his rightful place, all the other nations must be subjected to him and the warring powers conquered. Therefore each of the books of the apocalyptic literature has a sense of impending doom or a cataclysmic end that ushers in the reign of peace. The other phrase worth noting from this passage is "the Day of the Lord." The use of this phrase directs our attention to something that would be in the apocalyptic literature genera. It denotes the fateful day when God will return for his final judgment upon the nations and the beginning of the restoration.

Zephaniah 3:1-5

Notice the elements of this passage that relate to the coming end: rebellion, pollution, tyranny, accepts no correction, hears no voice, treachery, insolence, profanity. All of these problems

illustrate the importance of God's law and the importance of that law for the coming kingdom. On another note, these laws are the sources of God's judgment for those who follow the laws will also enter the new kingdom.

Haggai

The Prophet Haggai prophesized after the Babylonian captivity around the same time as the return from exile and the rebuilding of the Temple. In the opening verses of this book we get most of the historical information about this prophet. This prophet prophesized in a similar manner to the Prophet Ezra in that he encouraged the people to rebuild the Temple. Unlike the Prophet Ezra, Haggai went beyond the rebuilding of the Temple and foresaw the future glory that the Temple would become. As I mentioned in the section on the Prophet Ezra, the people would not start the construction of the Temple or any of the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem until a prophet arose to tell them how to construct it; everything must be built by the will of God.

Outline

- I. Exhortation to Rebuild the Temple (1)
 - a. Historical setting (1:1)
 - b. Exhortation to rebuild the Temple (1:2-11)
 - c. Haggai's prophesy (1:13)
- II. The New Temple (2)
 - a. Historical setting (2:1)
 - b. Future glory of the Temple (2:3-9)
 - c. Rejection of the unclean (2:10-14)
 - d. Reflection on God's providence (2:15-19)
 - e. Pledge to Zerubbabel (2:20-23)

Passages:

Haggai 1:5-6

A reflection on God's providence is a key idea in this book. The main emphasis on God's providence is meant to make a contrast between the way the people are experiencing God and the way they give back or show honor to God.

Haggai 2:16-17, 19

God challenges the people to look beyond the immediacy of his providence to a future restoration. Each of these disappointments God will bless and make abundant once again. These two passages are best seen in light of Haggai 1:13: "I am with you, says the Lord."

Zechariah

The setting for this book is much like the other books we have discussed today: the Babylonian exile. Zechariah reads much differently than the other books and is similar to Daniel in its style of writing and literature. Although Zephaniah and Joel are considered apocalyptic in tone, Zechariah is a clear example of the style of this genera. From the beginning of the book,

Zechariah has visions indicative of the end and the coming of the Messiah. The whole book centers around the coming of the Messiah and what that moment will be like. Four represents the four corners of the earth or from all sides, directions, or angles.

Outline:

- I. The visions (1-7)
 - a. The four horsemen (1:7-17)
 - b. Four horns and blacksmiths (2:1-4)
 - c. New Jerusalem (2:5-17)
 - d. High priest (3:1-10, 4:4-10)
 - e. Lampstand (4:1-3, 11-14)
 - f. Flying Scroll (5:1-4)
 - g. Flying Bushel (5:5-10)
 - h. Four chariots (6:1-8)
 - i. New King (6:9-15)
 - j. Return of fasting (7:1-14)
- II. Coming Messiah (8-14)
 - a. Day of the Lord (8:1-23)
 - b. Destruction (9:1-8)
 - c. Restoration (9:9-17)
 - d. New Order (10:1—11:3)
 - e. Shepherd Allegory (11:4-17)
 - f. Jerusalem (12)
 - g. True Worship (13)
 - h. Return to Jerusalem (14)

Passages:

Zechariah 1:7-17

The four horseman represent the four corners of the earth, which means that from all directions the people will be destroyed. This arrangement is the worst possible scenario for a battle since you cannot defend yourself or fight from all angles, it spells utter defeat. Passages for reference: Job 2:2, Revelation 6.

Zechariah 4:1-3,11-14

The imagery of this passage should scream Temple imagery. The Heavenly reality is that there will be the full expression of God but the oil will never run dry, one of the promises of the Holy Land.

Zechariah 6:9-15

Notice some of the parallels that we are experiencing in our readings during Advent. A “Shoot” is now a proper noun. The Shoot is a king who will rise up and usher in a new age of peace.

Zechariah 9:9-10

This passage is one of the prophecies of the coming Messiah that is empathized in the New Testament.

Zechariah 11:1-17

The use of the term “shepherd” is analogous to a king or ruler. Therefore this entire passage is a rebuttal of the poor ruling of the kings of Israel.

Malachi

Malachi bridges the divide between the social critique common to the prophetic literature and the apocalyptic genera that is also very prevalent. The book begins with a social critique of the people and then moves into the restorative and messianic focus that takes a more apocalyptic theme. The Book of Malachi was written after the exile had concluded but before Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. Most likely the prophecies were in response to the actions of priest in the newly constructed Temple since the book is centered around the sins of the priests.

Outline:

- I. Condemnation and Critique (1-2)
 - a. Sins of the priest (1:6—2:9)
 - b. Sins of the people (2:10-17)
- II. Restoration and coming Messiah predicted (3)

Passages:

Malachi 1:10-14

This passage requires your imagination. What is happening in the Temple? Recall some of the images of the offering of holocausts and burnt offering and this passage will come to life. Basically the laws prescribed for the offering of sacrifices were not followed but instead the priests did something else, which is an abomination.

Malachi 3:1-5

Predication of the coming Messiah. This passage is read in the lectionary two days before Christmas. The prediction of the Messiah still influences the culture and people of the Holy Land. The Messiah was predicted to come to the Temple. Therefore the Moslims do not want the Temple rebuilt and, if the Jews succeed in rebuilding the Temple, then they believe that the Messiah will return. But the Messiah ushers in an age of judgement.