

Minor Prophets with a Major Message

January 16, 2011

Intro: The Minor Prophets are fairly unknown to most of us. Not only are they little and in the middle of the Bible, but they're in the Old Testament which is much harder to understand than the New. Not only that, but I can't pronounce most of their names and one of them is a fig-pincher. What?

My hope is that throughout this series on the Minor Prophets that both you and I would come to see the deep riches of God's promises within them. Yes, there is much talk of judgment and of discipline, of harsh reality and searing questions of justice, but at the root of these harder things of God lies the heart of a Husband who desires the exclusive love of His wife. God is pictured as the faithful One and His judgments are His efforts to turn the heart of His cheating people back to Himself where they will find their sufficient joy. It's amazing to me that God doesn't give up. We, who are comfortable with divorce in our land, particularly when a spouse cheats, have a God who pursues His cheating whoring people until He turns them back and then draws them into His arms and blesses them. What an incredible picture of grace and astounding love!

I am really looking forward to this series for these reasons: 1) I am excited to read the Old Testament again b/c we don't understand it very well (myself included, 2) the prophets reveal who God is and how He acts towards His people and towards the world and that is always exciting, and 3) these small prophetic books are full of the promises of the Christ, the King who will restore all things to the way that they're supposed to be. In this sense, we have some very Christ-centered prophets who spoke with the Spirit of Christ to proclaim the coming of Christ and the restorative atoning reign of Christ. I hope that hearing the Lord's words over the next months will spur you and I on together to love Him more deeply, truly, and exclusively as we live out such love in obedient joy.

I will be taking the Minor Prophets in the order which they are listed in our Christian Bibles, so we will begin with Hosea next week. But for now, let's take a broader look and see what the overarching themes of every one of the MP is. First...

1) What Are They?

a) Minor

- i) not called "minor" because of a lack of importance, but because of their size compared to Isaiah, Ezekiel, etc.
 - (1) Many Messianic promises are given in these small books
 - (2) Because with all the judgments prophesied, of which there is much, there are also great promises of deliverance and restoration
- ii) In fact, they were so small that they were combined into one book so as not to lose any scrolls: The Book of the 12
 - (1) Jerome and Josephus had only 24 and 22 books in the Hebrew Scriptures, respectively, because they combine them into one book (also with Kings, Chronicles, and sometimes Judges/Ruth) of the 12
 - (2) With codices (book formats) modern Hebrew Bibles split them up again and contain 36 divisions of books (all have the same books, just divided up differently)
 - (3) The Christian Scriptures list 39 books, splitting up the 12 MP individually

b) Prophets

- i) Prophets do not merely "foresee" events of the future, but because God knows the end from the beginning and is sovereign, their messages often tell of future works of God and men
- ii) Prophets are those called upon to speak God's words to His people
 - (1) Jer 1:5-10
 - (2) Numbers 22:38
- iii) They are not chosen because they are perfect, or more godly (look at Jonah), but because God has chosen them
 - (1) see Balaam in Number 22 and his response to an animal that refused him three times
 - (2) see King Saul, who prophesied as well in 1 Samuel 10
- iv) Prophets not only proclaim God's decrees and promises, but also His interpretation of those words as well

c) Names

- i) Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
- ii) They are not specifically chronological, although they may be close
- iii) They seem to be grouped together in pairs with one prophetic word to the northern Kingdom of Israel and one to the southern Kingdom of Judah
- iv) Hosea seems to be listed first because it summarizes and encapsulates much of what follows in the other prophecies, much like Romans being listed first in the NT Pauline letters because it is a grand summary of the gospel

d) History

- i) 880BC to 430BC
- ii) prophecies to Israel, Judah, Edom, Ninevah, Philistia, Moab, and others
- iii) God, through various prophets in various places, continued to reveal His covenant faithfulness and promise of a Kingdom of righteousness and peace

2) Why Are They Important?

a) God's Word doesn't change

- i) The perfect Word of God in the Old Testament is still the Word of God
- ii) All Scripture, the Minor Prophets included, testify of Jesus and reveal God to man
 - (1) Jesus came to us in the context of Jewish culture, covenant, and history
 - (2) These Scriptures were the Scriptures of His day, and His teaching and revelation of Himself to His people is rooted in them and our understanding of Him is contingent upon them, too

b) The conditions of their societies are much the same as ours today

- i) Self-centered Religion
 - (1) legislating power to oppress the weaker/poor
 - (2) building wealth for oneself instead of showing humble mercy toward the weak
 - (3) trusting in one's "own way" rather than in the LORD
 - (a) Hos 10:13
 - (4) arrogance
 - (a) Amos 6:8
- ii) pluralistic/idolatrous
 - (1) Hos 8:9 "hired lovers"
 - (2) Amos 2:4 "their lies have led them astray just like their fathers"
 - (3) Zeph 1:4 "cut off Baal from this place (Judah)"
- iii) affluent
 - (1) Hos 10:1-2
 - (2) Mal 3:5 (oppressing the poor)
 - (3) Amos 6:8 – citadels as indicative of arrogance

c) It was the Spirit of Christ speaking through them for you

- i) 1 Peter 1:10-12
- ii) Hebrews 1:1-2,12
 - (1) if we trust verse 2, we must also trust v1
 - (2) Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever

3) What Do They Have to Teach Us Today?

a) God is sovereign

- i) As the Only Infinite God Almighty
 - (1) He brings drought and famine by controlling weather (Hos 2:8,12) and animals
 - (2) He brings pestilence and disease (Hos 2:9;
 - (3) He roars forth from Zion (Joel 3:16; Amos 1:2)
- ii) As a spurned Husband
 - (1) He works to turn His wayward Bride
 - (2) He makes promises to her that He intends to keep

- iii) As a rejected Father
 - (1) As a father disciplines his son, so God will do to His children
 - (2) He does this not as retribution, but to shape him into maturity and keep him from foolish sin
 - (3) Because he loves his own

b) God is Holy: Return to Me!

- i) The MP have extensive calls to holiness and the judgments that fall upon God's people and God's enemies because of sin
 - (1) Idolatry is a common and rampant sin of Israel, as it is with Christians
 - (2) This turning to idols and other gods/lovers angers God and His jealous love of His people brings great wrath
 - (3) Interestingly, it is not merely sin against God's *law* that angers God, but rather it is the sin against His *grace* that angers Him as a rejected Husband & covenant God
 - (a) It is the rejection and unbelief of His kindness, love, and grace that turns Him to such severe discipline
 - (b) "It was I who brought you up from the land of Egypt..yet you silenced by prophets and caused my people to sin" (Amos 2:10-12)
 - (c) "Return to Me" is the purpose of all of God's judgments upon His people
- ii) Without repentance, judgment falls
 - (1) Repentance from trusting idols, trusting other lovers, depending on earthly kings
 - (2) idols of our hearts
 - (3) desires of our loins
 - (4) dependence upon earthly saviors
- iii) This creates a tension with His great love, also mentioned in seeming contrast, but it is not incongruent at all, especially in the light of the Cross of Christ

c) God is Radically Loving and Faithful: Return to Me!

- i) As the Only True God who dances with joy over His people (Zeph 3:17) as He quiets them with His love.
- ii) As a loving faithful husband
 - (1) These are His chosen people, His desire, Beloved people
 - (2) When they are deceived, He is jealous for them
 - (3) In His love, He disciplines, but He always pursues His people to bring them back to Himself
 - (4) He never fails His people, always remaining faithful, in spite of their infidelity
- iii) As a merciful and gracious father
 - (1) As a Father to a son, God parents His people
 - (2) Cherishes them, though they rebel
- iv) As a Lamb who laid down His life
 - (1) This act of substitution, through Christ who spoke to these prophets, is the preeminent declaration of God's love for His wayward whoring people
 - (2) Though are faithless and doubting, prone to seek out other helps than the sovereign Husband of our youth, God gave Himself to redeem us from that which enslaves us
 - (3) There is no God anywhere else who does this
 - (4) This tension between God's holy justice and His loving faithfulness is not answered in the OT, it is merely proclaimed and held in tension until the True King comes
 - (a) from Bethlehem (Mic 5:2)
 - (b) for all the nations (Mic 4:2)
 - (c) riding on a colt (Zech 9:9)
 - (d) to dwell in our midst (Zech 2:10)
 - (e) to heal apostasy and turn away God's anger (Hos 14:4)
 - (f) to send His Spirit to dwell in His people (Joel 2:28-32)
 - (g) to restore Creation to shalom (Amos 9:13-15) with His people made righteous
 - (h) to bring a Kingdom of Righteousness and Peace (Zech 10:12)

Conclusion:

These prophets, by the Spirit of Christ, were calling us back to the Lord; to turn from trusting in wealth, power, or salesmen of other promises of joy. God is faithful and good. We need to turn our backs on these other lovers and run back to Him again. For, it is in His faithful, powerful, covenant-keeping arms that we find our true joy. When He sovereignly chooses to bring trials and difficulties into our lives, let us see them as expressions of His holy love calling us back to Himself. Let us heed His call and return to Him, leaving all other trusts behind, holding our love exclusive to Him.

And when that tension between God's holy justice and His holy love arises within our hearts, let us look again to how God substituted Himself to solve His own tension: the Cross of Jesus Christ. God gave Himself in our place to satisfy His justice and pour out His love upon us. It is Jesus, God and man, that has secured our safety and brought us near to God. It is He who ascended to the right hand of God and poured out His Spirit upon His people that we might walk in the newness of life, obedient righteousness and exclusive love of Him. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.