

# WTF LIFE MAJOR LESSONS | from the MINOR PROPHETS



## LESSON 1 – INTRODUCTION

### FACILITATOR'S

Note

The following lesson is designed to help class participants develop an understanding of the background of the Minor Prophets. This is important, as it will set a foundation for all of our studies to come. Please realize that many volumes on each of these books have been written over the centuries. There is no way that we will be able to adequately nor comprehensively provide all introductory material available. However, it is our intent to provide a cursory overview that will help class participants understand the reason for studying the Minor Prophets. Too often today, many people do not feel the need to study these books, as they do not believe they pertain to the daily life of our modern culture. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

Through these studies, we will learn about the **“Prophetable” Life**. It is not one that many choose to take. However, it is one that God calls us to. You see, a prophet is one who speaks forth the Word of God. While only a few were called prophets through Scripture, all speak forth God’s Word today. This puts us all into very difficult circumstances. The message from God that we often bring is one that is not favorable and is contrary to the world. Yet, it is one we must share. The Minor Prophets take us into a world much like our own. A world in which people trust in material wealth and strength and forget about God. A world full of lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery. A world where oppression and injustice are rampant. A world in which people seek out those who speak pleasant messages that assure them that their deeds are acceptable and satisfactory. A world where people choose to make amends by sacrifice and religious checklists rather than by doing what is right in the sight of God. The Minor Prophets remind us that God is the final Word and He is calling us to be faithful to Him.

The study of the Minor Prophets this semester has a two-fold purpose. **First**, we hope that all class participants will gain a better knowledge and understanding of these “forgotten books” so that they may know more about human nature and God’s love and patience for us in spite of our waning commitments to Him. **Second**, we hope that this knowledge and understanding will lead our family members to demonstrate their wisdom of God’s Word by sharing it with those around them (i.e. – at school, at work, etc.). Having knowledge about a particular topic of study does not mean an internal change has been made that brings about action. The first step *is* to gain the knowledge (a matter of the HEAD). But then the longest journey begins, and it is only 12 inches. That 12-inch journey is going deeper with the knowledge to the point that you understand it (a matter of moving it from the HEAD to the HEART). The final step is to move from understanding to wisdom. This is demonstrated through people’s actions. When one takes what they know and understand and puts it into practice, then they

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demonstrate Godly wisdom (moving from the HEART to the HANDS – Matt. 7:24-27). So, this semester we hope to provide material that will provide knowledge (HEAD); then ask questions that will bring us understanding (HEART); and then motivate participants to go and live the Word in the world and demonstrate Godly wisdom (HANDS).

**HEAD**  **➔** **HEART**  **➔** **HANDS** 

We hope that by these studies that your class participants will not only hear, know, and understand the Word, but that they will also be driven to become the “Living Word” to the world around us. Your role in this process as a class facilitator is very important. Go beyond these lessons to demonstrate how what the Minor Prophets teach us can and should be lived daily. Use your life and the lives of others as examples of this “Living Word” concept. We are all the 67<sup>th</sup> book of Scripture as we engage the world with the Word of God. God bless you as you partner with His Spirit to share His message! Remember, don’t worry about what you will say or how you will say it. For at that time, the Spirit of your Father will be speaking through you (Matthew 10:19-20).

*As always, we would encourage you to begin preparing for each lesson by digging into the Word and specifically the text for each of the weeks. As you move through the Word, jot down any thoughts that come to you and particular passages that stand out and speak to you. We assure you that these will come into play as you facilitate this discussion. It is then that you should approach this lesson plan and use it (and others) only as a guide for the weeks to come. Your group is different than all the rest and so your lessons should be adapted accordingly.*

## PRAYER

Begin your time with a prayer asking God for the guidance of His Holy Spirit as you and your class seek to encounter Him through His Holy Word.

## FOCUS

- Presentation of introduction material for the Minor Prophets.
- Develop an interest in studying the Minor Prophets.
- Recognize that these books are not useless books that have no bearing on our lives today.

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## DISCUSSION STARTERS (OPTIONAL)

- Have any of you ever done a study of the Minor Prophets? If so, what do you remember learning from the study (biggest takeaway)?
- What are some of the most well known passages (or books) from the Minor Prophets and why?
- Why should we study these books? Do they really even matter to us today?

## KNOWLEDGE HEAD

### Introductory Material

- OVERVIEW
  - Consider these passages...
    - Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (Hebrews 1:1-2 ESV)
      - See also Numbers 12:6, 8 and Joel 2:28
    - And he (Jesus) said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:25-27 ESV)
    - Then he (Jesus) said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures... (Luke 24:44-45 ESV)
      - ASK:
        - How do these passages speak to the importance of not only the Old Testament, but also the Minor Prophets?
        - According to these passages, what are the Minor Prophets speaking to (or even toward)?
        - Remember what Romans 15:4 tells us: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

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- Note that the Bible unfolds God's purpose through Christ (see Eph. 3:10-11), and the prophets played a major role in the unveiling that mystery.
- It is important to remember that God did not always speak to man through His Son. There was a time when God spoke His Word through chosen messengers called "prophets." The prophets served as God's mouthpiece/spokesperson. Through them He communicated His will and expectations for His people.
  - Although the prophet was called by different names ("seer"—1 Sam. 9:9, "man of God"—1 Kings 13:1, "man of the spirit"—Hos. 9:7), the most common term used was "prophet" (Hebrew *nabi*) meaning "calling." This calling was both active and passive. Meaning, the prophet is both called by God and calls out the Word of God.
  - A prophet is someone who God raised up as a watchman on the wall to warn His people (Ezekiel 33).
- The prophets often risked their lives presenting God's Word and His disgust with idolatry by rebuking kings, princes, and rulers. We find that they frequently sacrificed everything to call people to repent and turn back to God.
- It is important to note that these prophets did speak to a particular people at a unique time in history. However, their messages still ring true today and impact our walk with God. Why? They speak to the same temptations and evils that we deal with today. The same message of repentance and returning to God is present. They also serve to point us to the Savior. The only true way to return to God.
- **Some basic principles in understanding the prophets...<sup>1</sup>**
  - The prophet was moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20, 21)
  - The prophet did not introduce a new law, but instead called men back to the law of Moses (Deut. 13:1-5)
  - The true prophet spoke things that would come to pass. If not, he was not a prophet of God (Deut. 18:20-22). God alone knows the future. Therefore, the prophet only spoke the words given by God. That's why the prophets often say things like, "Hear what the LORD says..."
  - Prophecies were conditional based upon the response of the hearers (Jer. 18:5-11; Jonah and the Ninevites repentance, 1 Kings 21:29).
  - The coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the church are vital subjects of the prophets (Acts 3:24-26; Rom. 1:2; 1 Peter 1:10-12).
  - God's definitive prophecy/revelation is given through His Son (SEE ABOVE: Luke 24:25-27, 44-45; Heb. 1:1-2)

<sup>1</sup> Jack P. Lewis, *The Minor Prophets*, 11<sup>th</sup> printing (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 8-9.

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- **ASK:**
  - How might these principles still be true today? Do we have modern day prophets? How and why? Are each of us prophets? In what way?
- **How the prophets wrote...**
  - The prophets did not use a poor or impoverished language in their writings. Instead, they spoke straight to the point as it fit the occasion. The prophets often spoke powerfully (and, at times, abrasively) of judgment on sin, but they would also speak with tenderness and compassion as they highlighted God's forgiveness and mercy. They spoke directly and clearly to specific situations, or with parables, metaphors and similes. At times, the prophets used dreams, visions to convey God's Word, or spoke from a direct word from God. They used stories, oracles, sermons, visions, arguments, and even raised questions and spoke directly to God rather than the people. Whatever method they used, it was always with one purpose: to make known God's will through His Word to His people. That one constant is seen throughout.
    - **ASK:**
      - God used a variety of people and methods to share His message with His people. How does God share His message today? One way? A variety of ways and persons? Give examples.
      - What does this teach us about both the consistency and diversity of God?
- **When the prophets wrote...**
  - The prophets fit into Israel's history and the biblical record between 2 Kings 14:23 through the end of the book with the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.
  - They span three periods of history. In these three periods, Israel and Judah find themselves under the rule and oppression of foreign peoples.
    1. The Assyrian Period (8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.)
      - a. Jonah (ca. 790-750 B.C.)
      - b. Amos (755 B.C.)
      - c. Hosea (750-725 B.C.)
        - *Isaiah (740-700 B.C.)*
      - d. Micah (735-700 B.C.)
        - *Jeremiah (626-586 B.C. and after)*
      - e. Zephaniah (630-625 B.C.)
      - f. Nahum (625-612 B.C.)
    2. The Babylonian Period (7<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.)
      - a. Habakkuk (ca. 605 B.C.)
    3. The Persian Period (6<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.) (Exilic and Post Exilic Periods)

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- Ezekiel (593-570 B.C.)
  - Daniel (605-536 B.C.)
- a. Haggai (520 B.C.)
- b. Zechariah (520-518 B.C.)
- c. Malachi (ca. 440 B.C.)
- It is unknown when Obadiah (845 B.C.?) and Joel (830 B.C.?) were written, but it is believed they were some of the earliest written during the early Assyrian period.
- The Major Prophets are included above to understand their historical placement with the Minor Prophets.
  - **NOTE:** The only reason the titles of “Major” and “Minor” are given to these books is in relation to their length, NOT their content. Please keep this in mind. They are in NO way lesser than what we term the Major Prophets.
- Major Historical Events (during the writings of the Minor Prophets)<sup>2</sup>
  - **721 B.C.** – The fall of Samaria to Assyria; Northern Kingdom exiled
  - **612 B.C.** – The fall of Nineveh; Babylonian, Mede, Scythian invasions
  - **606 B.C.** – Battle of Carchemish; Babylon becomes dominant in the Middle East
  - **597 B.C.** – Fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar; exile of King Jehoiachin
  - **586 B.C.** – Destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar
  - **539 B.C.** – Persian period begins
  - **536 B.C.** – Decree of Cyrus permitting Jews to return to and reconstruct the Jerusalem temple; return led by Zerubbabel
  - **520 B.C.** – Haggai and Zechariah stir up the people to resume the work on the temple
  - **516 B.C.** – The second temple is completed and dedicated
  - **457 B.C.** – Return led by Ezra
  - **445 B.C.** – Jerusalem walls rebuilt; led by Nehemiah
- **Why the prophets wrote...**
  - The primary reason for the prophetic writings was to bring and awareness of breaches made in covenant between God and His people in a particular historical circumstance.
  - God’s covenant was established to make God’s people holy and to focus their worship on God as the one and only God. However, Israel made it a habit to rebel

<sup>2</sup> Jack P. Lewis, *The Minor Prophets*, 11<sup>th</sup> printing (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 12-13.

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and follow other gods (or more appropriately their self-gods). These “rebellions” framed the writings of the prophets as God presented His case before His people. Like any secular lawsuit, the prophetic lawsuit included:

- Arraignment in God’s court
- Accusation brought against the defendant
- God’s pronouncement of sentence as Divine Judge
- Description of punishment
- God’s promise of restoration through grace and forgiveness (unique to God)
  - **ASK:**
    - How has God demonstrated the same pattern through Christ and the New Testament?
    - What does this mean for us today?
- Some general themes:
  - **Holiness of God** – God is set apart from the world and all that exists. He is absolutely pure, righteous, faithful, just, merciful, tender and compassionate, and loving.
  - **Sovereignty of God** – God rules above all, through all, and in all.
  - **Immutability of God** – God carries out His Word and promises. One can know beyond a doubt that He will be consistent and faithful.
  - **Sin** – God hates sin! He will not tolerate, overlook, or excuse it. However, He is gracious and forgiving to those who repent and turn to Him.
  - **Repentance and Righteousness** – This is one of the primary “calls” of the prophet: REPENT. Even though God’s punishment is just, but often severe, He is great in mercy and forgiveness for those who have a broken and contrite heart.
  - **Worship** – This is our proper approach to God. With genuine awe and reverence toward God, one will always have praise, adoration, and thanksgiving on their lips.
    - **ASK:**
      - How might we relate to these themes today? Should we focus on these themes? Why?
      - In what ways are the struggles in these areas the same or different from the days of the prophets to our circumstances today?

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## UNDERSTANDING ♥ HEART

- So what? What does all this mean and why is it important?
  - The message of the prophets speaks to us today. An understanding of the political, moral, and religious conditions of ancient Israel and Judah (as well as the surrounding nations) makes for a clear understanding of the prophets' message. By understanding their message, our faith today is strengthened when we see the fulfillment of those prophecies and predictions throughout history (and specifically in the New Testament).
  - Are we guilty of the same sins condemned by the prophets? What does that say about us? We can all say that the same sins that destroyed Israel are in fact the same struggles that cut us off from God today. The same punishments for unfaithfulness await us if we do not repent and allow the grace of God through Christ to cover us. This is a message that **MUST** be proclaimed throughout the earth (even when it may cost us our very lives).
- What makes you most nervous about this study? The most excited?
- The Minor Prophets call us to repentance, to live transformed lives, and to live in love and obedience to God. Do you feel you have the passion for God and His Word the way the prophets did? Would you be willing to risk it all to share God's Word even when it is extremely unfavorable to the hearers? Why or why not? What is holding you back?

## WISDOM ✎ HANDS

- What can you do this week, tomorrow, to proclaim God's Word without fear?
- Who in your group of friends or family do you need to share the message with TODAY?

## PRAYER



End your time together with a prayer. Ask God to help you in sharing His Gospel message of Love and Grace to a lost world. Ask Him to open the eyes of our hearts through this study so that we may know Him more and develop an intimate relationship with Him.

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## SEMESTER OUTLINE (SPRING 2016)

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE MINOR PROPHETS – Why Study This? (January 3)
2. HOSEA – PART 1 (January 10)
3. HOSEA – PART 2 (January 17)
4. JOEL (January 24)
5. AMOS (January 31)
6. OBADIAH & NAHUM (February 7)
7. JONAH (February 14)
8. MICAH (February 21)
9. HABAKKUK (February 28)
10. ZEPHANIAH (March 6)
11. HAGGAI (March 13)
12. ZECHARIAH – PART 1 (April 3)
13. ZECHARIAH – PART 2 (April 10)
14. MALACHI (April 17)
15. CONCLUSION TO THE MINOR PROPHETS (April 24)