

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
Sarasota, Florida

COME, JOIN THE CONVERSATION
ON
THE MINOR PROPHETS

SESSION PLAN #1 for THURSDAY, February 5, 2015

OPENING PRAYER

MUTUAL SHARING OF THE PEACE OF OUR LORD BETWEEN GOD'S PEOPLE

OBJECTIVES FOR THIS SESSION:

- to gain some understanding of O.T. prophecy and especially the role of the Minor Prophets;
- to attempt to understand more fully the message of those minor Prophets;
- to take a cursory look at some great prophetic themes;
- to look at the prophets: Obadiah, Joel and Jonah

STUDY NOTATION: *All biblical quotations cited in this session plan, except where specifically noted, have been taken from a biblical translation identified as the **COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE** [CEB]*

GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

1. Although Christians no longer are bound to the O.T. teachings on such issues as *“Justification before God,”* a study of the Old Testament, in general, and the message of the Prophets in particular, is still valuable for us today: Why?.....
 - a) It is written for our learning; it is a source of comfort and hope (cf. **Romans 15:4** – *“Whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction so that we could have hope through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures.”*)
 - b) It is written for our admonition; we learn what mistakes to avoid (cf. **1 Corinthians 10:11** – *“These things happened to them as an example and were written as a warning for us to whom the end of time has come.”*)
 - c) Scripture, being inspired by God, through the testimony of humans, is profitable *“for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”* (cf. **2 Timothy 3:14-17** – *“hope to come to you quickly. But I’m writing these things to you so that if I’m delayed, you’ll know how you should behave in God’s household. It is the church of the living God and the backbone and support of the truth. Without question, the mystery of godliness is great: he was revealed as a human, declared righteous by the Spirit, seen by angels, preached throughout the nations, believed in around the world, and taken up in glory.”*)
2. This is especially true with regard to the “Minor Prophets.”
 - a) A collection of **12 books** that make up the last part of the Old Testament
 - b) **Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi** (listed here in the order in which they are found in the Bible; however, our consideration of the Minor Prophets will not be exactly in that order.)

WHO WERE THE PROPHETS?

1. The Old Testament had a VARIETY OF RELIGIOUS “INSTRUCTORS”

a) Moses – a lawgiver

- cf. John 1:17 – *“as the Law was given through Moses, so grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ.”*
- cf. John 7:19 – *“Didn’t Moses give you the Law? Yet none of you keep the Law. Why do you want to kill me?”*

b) Priests – administrators of the Law

- cf. Leviticus 10:8-11 – *“The LORD said to Aaron, Both you and your sons must not drink wine or beer when you enter the meeting tent so that you don’t die—this is a permanent rule throughout your future generations— so that you can distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean, and so that you can teach the Israelites all the rules that the LORD spoke to them through Moses.”*
- cf. Hosea 4:6 – *“My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Since you have rejected knowledge, so I will reject you from serving me as a priest. Since you have forgotten the Instruction of your God, so also I will forget your children.”*
- cf. Ezekiel 22:26 – *“Her priests have done violence to my instructions and made my holy things impure. They have not clearly separated the holy from the ordinary, and they have not taught the difference between unclean and clean things. They’ve disregarded my Sabbaths. So I’ve been degraded among them.”*

c) Wise Persons (men and women) – those who provided counsel

- cf. 2 Samuel 20: 16-22 -*“Then a wise woman called from the city, “Listen! Listen! Tell Joab to come over here, so I can talk to him.” So Joab approached her, and the woman said, “Are you Joab?” “I am,” he answered. “Pay close attention to the words of your female servant,” she said. “I’m listening,” Joab replied. She said, “People used to say long ago: ‘Ask your question at Abel,’ and that settled the matter. I am one of the peaceful and faithful in Israel, but you are trying to kill a city that is one of Israel’s mothers! Why would you annihilate the LORD’s inheritance?” Joab answered, “I would never, ever annihilate or destroy such a thing! That’s not the issue. A man named Sheba, Bichri’s son, who is from the Ephraim highlands, has rebelled against King David. Just hand him over, and I’ll leave the city alone.” The woman said to Joab, “His head will be thrown over the wall to you!” When the woman went to everyone with her wise counsel, they cut off the head of Sheba, Bichri’s son, and threw it out to Joab. Then Joab sounded the trumpet, and his troops left the city, returning to their homes. But Joab returned to the king in Jerusalem.”*

d) Psalmists/poets – the “sweet singers” of Israel

- cf. 2 Samuel 23:1-2 – *“Now these are the last words of David: David son of Jesse says, and the man who was raised on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, says, The Spirit of the Lord spoke in and by me, and His Word was upon my tongue.”* [AMPLIFIED BIBLE]

e) Prophets – communicators of the Word of God

2. A **“PROPHET”** was a spokesman for another:
- like Aaron was for his brother Moses
 - cf. Exodus 4:16 – **“Aaron will speak for you to the people. He’ll be a spokesperson for you, and you will be like God for him.”**
 - cf. Exodus 7:1 – **“The LORD said to Moses, “See, I’ve made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet.”**
 - literal translation of the word PROPHET: one who **“boils up like a fountain.”**
 - under the influence of the Holy Spirit, a prophet was –
 - ...a spokesman for God (cf. 2 Peter 1:21 – **“because no prophecy ever came by human will. Instead, men and women led by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”**)
 - ...was given something to say and had to say it! (cf. Jeremiah 20:7-9 – **“LORD, you enticed me, and I was taken in. You were too strong for me, and you prevailed. Now I’m laughed at all the time; everyone mocks me. Every time I open my mouth, I cry out and say, “Violence and destruction!” The LORD’s word has brought me nothing but insult and injury, constantly. I thought I’ll forget him; I’ll no longer speak in his name. But there’s an intense fire in my heart, trapped in my bones. I’m drained trying to contain it; I’m unable to do it.”**)
 - a prophet was primarily a “forth-teller”, although sometimes a **“fore-teller!”**
 - ...God’s Word often pertained to future events
 - ...the fulfilled prophecies of these prophets are therefore a strong proof of inspiration
 - ...but many of their words concerned not the future, but current events
3. **OTHER DESIGNATIONS** given to define the role of a Prophet.
- “Seers”** (*used early in Israel’s history*) – cf. 1 Samuel 9:9 – **“(Earlier in Israel, someone going to consult with God would say, “Let’s go to the seer,” because the people who are called prophets today were previously called seers.)**
 - “Man of God”** – cf. 1 Samuel 9:6 – **“But the boy said to him, “Listen, there’s a man of God in this town. He’s famous—everything he says actually happens! So let’s go there. Maybe he’ll be able to tell us which way we should go.”**
 - “Servant of God”** – cf. 1 Kings 18:36 – **“At the time of the evening offering, the prophet Elijah drew near and prayed: “LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. I have done all these things at your instructions.”**
 - “Messengers”** – cf. Isaiah 42:19 – **“Who is blind if not my servant and deaf like my messenger whom I send? Who is blind like the restored one, blind like the servant of the LORD?”**
 - “Watchman”** – cf. Ezekiel 3:17 – **“Son of man, I have made you a watchman to the house of Israel; therefore hear the word at My mouth and give them warning from Me.” [AMP]**
4. Assignment of Modern **CLASSIFICATIONS OF PROPHETS**
- “Oral” Prophets** – those who left no writings bearing their names
 - Elijah – cf. 1 Kings 17
 - Elisha – cf. 2 Kings 2
 - Nathan – cf. 2 Samuel 12
 - Gad – cf. 2 Samuel 24:11
 - Ahijah – cf. 1 Kings 11:29
 - “Literary” Prophets** – those who left books bearing their names

5. **LITERARY PROPHETS** categorized as “**Major**” and “**Minor**”

- a) St. Augustine is credited with being the first to classify them in this fashion.
- b) The distinction pertains only to the length of the books
- c) “**Major**” prophets include the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel
- d) “**Minor**” prophets are those 12 books from Hosea to Malachi

[Note: As we consider the writings of the “Minor” Literary Prophets, it should be noted that the order of these books in our Bibles is not today considered chronological. Dating the prophets is not without considerable controversy; with some books it can be very difficult. What will be provided in this study are estimates based on the latest scholarship available to your facilitator.]

6. Understanding the **PROPHETS’ MESSAGE**:

- a) 3 things to keep in mind when you study the prophets:

- i) The social, political and religious conditions of the times

- any interpretation must consider how the message was relevant for the people to whom the prophet spoke;
- secondary fulfillment of prophecy is often found in the N.T.;
- guard against making interpretations that are purely speculative;
- any application to modern-day events must be very carefully harmonized in light of the N.T.

- ii) God’s relation to the heathen nations (*those other than Israel and Judah*)

- the prophets often revealed how God directed their destiny and judged them;
- ?Does this provide any insights into how Christ rules the nations today???
 - cf. Matthew 28:18 – “*Jesus came near and spoke to them, “I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth.”*”
 - cf. Revelation 1:5 – “*and from Jesus Christ—the faithful witness, the firstborn from among the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”*”
 - cf. Revelation 2:26-27 – “*To those who emerge victorious, keeping my practices until the end, I will give authority over the nations— to rule the nations with an iron rod and smash them like pottery”*”

- iii) Make special note of any teaching regarding the Messiah and His Coming Kingdom:

- cf. Acts 26:6-7 – “*Today I am standing trial because of the hope in the promise God gave our ancestors. This is the promise our twelve tribes hope to receive as they earnestly worship night and day. The Jews are accusing me, King Agrippa, because of this hope!”*”
- cf. Acts 28:20 – “*This is why I asked to see you and speak with you: it’s because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.”*”
- the immediate mission of most prophets was to save God’s people from idolatry and wickedness;
- failing that, they went to announce God’s judgment and the coming destruction of the nation;
- many prophets, however, left a message of hope for the future, regarding the Messiah who would come and establish a kingdom that could never be destroyed.

7. Several **GREAT PROPHETIC THEMES:**

- a) **Holiness of God** – absolutely pure, righteous, just, merciful, tender, loving, longsuffering;
- b) **Sovereignty of God** – rules the entire universe; is above all;
- c) **Immutability of God’s Word** – carries out all His promises; totally dependable; consistent with His Word;
- d) **Terribleness of Sin** – God abhors iniquity; but, He is willing to forgive those who humbly repent;
- e) **Call to Repentance and righteousness** – from all the prophets; though God’s punishment is severe, his mercy is great in loving kindness upon the righteous who are of a broken spirit and a contrite heart;
- f) **Worship is due God** – proper reverence, awe and respect for God will cause one to praise Him and give thanks for His wonderful grace and mercy.

BRIEF STUDY OF: OBADIAH:

1. **The Prophet:** his name means **“servant of the Lord”** – nothing else is known about him except that which can be gathered from his prophecy.
2. **Time of writing:** probably written about **585 B.C.E.**, after the fall of Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar (586 B.C.E.) and before the destruction of Edom five years later; this dating would make him a contemporary of Jeremiah. Occasion of the prophecy is the cruelty of the Edomites in rejoicing over the fall of Judah.
3. **Themes** addressed:
 - a) Day of the Lord
 - b) Edom’s destruction
 - c) Israel’s restoration
4. **Special fondness** for this book by Jews:
 - a) Because of the vengeance it pronounces upon Edom, their brother!
 - b) Its chief importance lies in the predictions of doom upon Edom, the descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob. (*Edom had conducted continual violence toward Jacob.*). The prophecy speaks about **the type of unchangeable hostility of the flesh toward that which is born of the spirit.**
5. **Main teachings:**
 - a) Jehovah has a special interest in Israel.
 - b) Jehovah will establish a new kingdom, with Judah and Jerusalem as the center
 - c) Holiness will be the chief characteristic of that new kingdom
6. **Outline** of book:
 - a) Edom’s punishment, 1-9
 - She must fall: 1-4
 - Her allies will desert her: 5-7
 - Her Wisdom will fail her: 8-9
 - b) Edom’s sin: 10-14
 - c) Guilt of the nations: 15-16
 - d) Judah shall be restored: 17-21

7. **Applications for contemporary discussion** –

- a) Sins of pride
- b) Sins of rejoicing in another's misfortune
- c) Punishment according to our sin and of the same kind as was our sin

BRIEF STUDY OF: JOEL

1. **The Prophet**: his name means "Jehovah is God." His birth-place and conditions of life are unknown.
2. **Time of writing**: one of the earliest of prophetic books; he very *probably* prophesied in Judah, during the reign of Joash, king of Israel; and, Amaziah, king of Judah; Joel's references to the temple and its services have caused some scholars to conclude that he was also a priest!
cf. **Joel 2:15-17** – ***"Blow the horn in Zion; demand a fast; request a special assembly. Gather the people; prepare a holy meeting; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the groom leave his room and the bride her chamber. Between the porch and the altar let the priests, the LORD's ministers, weep. Let them say, "Have mercy, LORD, on your people, and don't make your inheritance a disgrace, an example of failure among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"***

The occasion of the prophecy were 4 successive plagues of locusts (2:25) and an unprecedented drought (2:23).

The people repent and the calamity is removed. This is used by the prophet to foreshadow the coming destruction and restoration of Israel. This restoration has been used to prefigure the Christian church and its triumph on earth.

3. **Themes** addressed: "**The Day of the Lord.**" – those terrible judgments that would come upon the people because of their sins.
4. **Main teachings**: cf. **Joel 2:28-32** – ***"After that I will pour out my spirit upon everyone; your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions. In those days, I will also pour out my spirit on the male and female slaves. I will give signs in the heavens and on the earth—blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood before the great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. But everyone who calls on the LORD's name will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be security, as the LORD has promised; and in Jerusalem, the LORD will summon those who survive."***

This prophecy fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost! (cf. Acts 2:16-21)

One of the greatest values of the book is its optimism; there was victory ahead; the righteous would finally triumph and be saved and God's enemies will be destroyed. The conflict of good and evil and of Israel and her enemies will end in complete and glorious triumph for Israel and right.

5. **Outline** of book:
 - a) The Call to Repentance (1:1 – 2:17)
 - by the scourge of locusts and drought (chp. 1)
 - by the scourge to come (2:1-17)
 - b) Israel's Repentance and Jehovah's promised Blessing (2:18 – 3:21)
 - material blessings (2:18-27)
 - in the world there will be Judgment (chp. 3)

6. **Applications for contemporary discussion** –
 - a) References to Israel's sins and our own
 - Idolatry
 - Adultery
 - Drunkenness
 - Licentiousness

JONAH

1. **The Prophet:** his name means “done.” He is a son of Amittai; his home was in Gath-hepher: a village of Zebulun, which means that Jonah belonged to one of the ten tribes of Israel and not to Judah. He is first mentioned in 2 Kings 14:28, where he prophesied the success of Jeroboam II, in his war with Syria; this would also result in restoration of territory that other nations had taken from Israel.

2. **Time of writing:** uncertain, but probably at a very early date (ca. 798 B.C.E.)

3. **Themes** addressed: Jonah as a type of “Jesus Christ”; Mercy to those who are repentant.

4. **Main teachings:**
 - a) Jonah differs from all other prophetic books in that it is a narrative and more “the history of a prophecy than prophecy itself.” Other prophetic books are filled with prophetic utterances, while this book records the experiences and work of Jonah, and very little of his utterances.
 - b) The Story of Jonah has been compared to those of Elijah (1 Kings 17-19) and Elisha (2 Kings 4-6)
 - c) Although full of miraculous elements, the evident purpose is to teach great moral and spiritual lessons.
 - d) Jonah has often been described as the most “Christian” of all the O.T. books. Its central truth is the universality of the divine plan of redemption. Nowhere else in the O.T. is there such stress laid upon the love of God as embracing in its scope the whole human race.

5. **Outline** of book:
 - a) Jonah's 1st Call and his flight from duty (chapters 1 & 2)
 - The call; flight; punishment (1:1-16)
 - Repentance and rescue (1:17 – 2:10)
 - b) Jonah's 2nd Call and his preaching @ Nineveh (chapter 3)
 - The 2nd call (3:1-2)
 - Jonah's preaching against Nineveh (3:2-4)
 - Nineveh repents (3:5-9)

- Nineveh is spared (3:10)
- c) Jonah's anger and God's Mercy (chapter 4)
- Jonah's anger (4:1-4)
 - The lessons of the gourd (4:5-11)

6. **Applications for contemporary discussion** –

- a) The different elements of character noticeable in Jonah/comparisons with us
- b) Dangers of disobedience to self and others
- c) Possibilities of influence for the man commissioned of God (*Jonah's influence on both the sailors and on Nineveh*)
- d) God's care for 'heathen' nations and its bearing on nations in today's world
- e) The nature of true Repentance and God's Forgiveness

DISMISSAL:

IMPORTANT NOTE: There will be **NO session next Thursday, February 12th**. Participants are encouraged to attend the **"SIR"** presentation to be presented by the **Rev. Dr. Marcus Miller**, starting @ **10 AM, in the sanctuary**.

CONVERSATIONS ON THE MINOR PROPHETS will resume on **Thursday, February 19th, at 10:30 AM** in Ogram Hall. Discussion will focus on: **AMOS, HOSEA, MICAH and ZEPHANIAH**.

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per: hjm