

## Minor Prophets – Brief Summaries

**Hosea:** The Book of Hosea can be divided into two parts: (1) Hosea 1:1-3:5 is a description of an adulterous wife and a faithful husband, symbolic of the unfaithfulness of Israel to God through idolatry, and (2) Hosea 3:6-14:9 contains the condemnation of Israel, especially Samaria, for the worship of idols and her eventual restoration.

The first section of the book contains three distinctive poems illustrating how God's children returned time after time to idolatry. God commands Hosea to marry Gomer, but after bearing him three children, she walks away from Hosea to her lovers. The symbolic emphasis can be seen clearly in the first chapter as Hosea compares Israel's actions to turning from a marriage to life as a prostitute. The second section contains Hosea's denunciation of the Israelites but followed by the promises and the mercies of God.

The Book of Hosea is a prophetic accounting of God's relentless love for His children. Since the beginning of time God's ungrateful and undeserving creation has been accepting God's love, grace, and mercy while still unable to refrain from its wickedness.

The last part of Hosea shows how God's love once again restores His children as He forgets their misdeeds when they turn back to Him with a repentant heart. The prophetic message of Hosea foretells the coming of Israel's Messiah 700 years in the future. Hosea is quoted often in the New Testament.

**Joel:** A terrible plague of locusts is followed by a severe famine throughout the land. Joel uses these happenings as the catalyst to send words of warning to Judah. Unless the people repent quickly and completely, enemy armies will devour the land as did the natural elements. Joel appeals to all the people and the priests of the land to fast and humble themselves as they seek God's forgiveness. If they will respond, there will be renewed material and spiritual blessings for the nation. But the Day of the Lord is coming. At this time the dreaded locusts will seem as gnats in comparison, as all nations receive His judgment.

The overriding theme of the Book of Joel is the Day of the Lord, a day of God's wrath and judgment. This is the Day in which God reveals His attributes of wrath, power and holiness, and it is a terrifying day to His enemies. In the first chapter, the Day of the Lord is experienced historically by the plague of locusts upon the land. Chapter 2:1-17 is a transitional chapter in which Joel uses the metaphor of the locust plague and drought to renew a call to repentance. Chapters 2:18-3:21 describes the Day of the Lord in eschatological terms and answers the call to repentance with prophecies of physical restoration (2:21-27), spiritual restoration (2:28-32), and national restoration (3:1-21).

**Amos:** Amos can see that beneath Israel's external prosperity and power, internally the nation is corrupt to the core. The sins for which Amos chastens the people are extensive: neglect of God's Word, idolatry, pagan worship, greed, corrupted leadership and oppression of the poor. Amos begins by pronouncing a judgment upon all the surrounding nations, then upon his own nation of Judah, and finally the harshest judgment is given to Israel. His visions from God reveal the same emphatic message: judgment is near. The book ends with God's promise to Amos of future restoration of the remnant.

**Obadiah:** Obadiah's message is final and it is sure: the kingdom of Edom will be destroyed completely. Edom has been arrogant, gloating over Israel's misfortunes, and when enemy armies attack Israel and the Israelites ask for help, the Edomites refuse and choose to fight against them, not for them. These sins of pride can be overlooked no longer. The book ends with the promise of the fulfillment and deliverance of Zion in the Last Days when the land will be restored to God's people as He rules over them.

**Jonah:** Jonah's fear and pride cause him to run from God. He does not wish to go to Nineveh to preach repentance to the people, as God has commanded, because he feels they are his enemies, and he is convinced that God will not carry out his threat to destroy the city. Instead he boards a ship for Tarshish, which is in the opposite direction. Soon a raging storm causes the crew to cast lots and determine that Jonah is the problem. They throw him overboard, and he is swallowed by a great fish. In its belly for 3 days and 3 nights, Jonah repents of his sin to God, and the fish vomits him up on dry land (we wonder what took him so long to repent). Jonah then makes the 500-mile trip to Nineveh and leads the city in a great revival. But the prophet is displeased (actually pouts) instead of being thankful when Nineveh repents. Jonah learns his lesson, however, when God uses a wind, a gourd and a worm to teach him that He is merciful.

**Micah:** The prophet condemns the rulers, priests, and prophets of Israel who exploit and mislead the people. It is because of their deeds that Jerusalem will be destroyed. The prophet Micah proclaims the deliverance of the people who will go from Jerusalem to Babylon and concludes with an exhortation for Jerusalem to destroy the nations who have gathered against her. The ideal ruler would come from Bethlehem to defend the nation, and the prophet proclaims the triumph of the remnant of Jacob and foresees a day when Yahweh will purge the nation of idolatry and reliance on military might. The prophet sets forth a powerful and concise summary of Yahweh's requirement for justice and loyalty and announces judgment upon those who have followed the ways of Omri and Ahab. The book closes with a prophetic liturgy comprising elements of a lament. Israel confesses its sin and is assured of deliverance through Yahweh's mighty acts.

**Nahum:** Nineveh once had responded to the preaching of Jonah and turned from their evil ways to serve the Lord God Jehovah. But 150 years later, Nineveh returned to idolatry, violence and arrogance (Nahum 3:1-4). Once again God sends one of His prophets to Nineveh preaching judgment in the destruction of the city and exhorting them to repentance. Sadly, the Ninevites did not heed's Nahum's warning and the city was brought under the dominion of Babylon.

**Habakkuk:** The Book of Habakkuk begins with Habakkuk crying out to God for an answer to why God's chosen people are allowed to suffer in their captivity (Habakkuk 1:1-4). The Lord gives His answer to Habakkuk, essentially stating, "You wouldn't believe it if I told you" (Habakkuk 1: 5-11). Habakkuk then follows up by saying, "Ok, you are God, but still tell me more about why this is happening" (Habakkuk 1:17-2:1). God then answers him again and gives him more information, then tells the earth to be silent before Him (Habakkuk 2:2-20). Then Habakkuk writes a prayer expressing his strong faith in God, even through these trials (Habakkuk 3:1-19).

**Zephaniah:** Zephaniah pronounces the Lord's judgment on the whole earth, on Judah, on the surrounding nations, on Jerusalem and on all nations. This is followed by proclamations of the Lord's blessing on all nations and especially on the faithful remnant of His people in Judah.

**Haggai:** Will the people of God reconsider their priorities, take courage, and act on the basis of God's promises? God sought to warn the people to heed His words. Not only did God warn them, but He also offered promises through His servant Haggai to motivate them to follow Him. Because the people of God reversed their priorities and failed to put God in first place in their lives, Judah was sent into Babylonian exile. In response to Daniel's prayer and in fulfillment of God's promises, God directed Cyrus the Persian king to allow the Jews in exile to go back to Jerusalem. A group of Jews returned to their land with great joy, put God first in their lives, worshiped Him and began to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem without the aid of the local people who lived in Palestine. Their courageous faith was met with opposition from the local people as well as the Persian government for approximately 15 years.

**Zechariah:** The Book of Zechariah teaches that salvation may be obtained by all. The last chapter depicts peoples from all over the world coming to worship God, who desires that all people follow Him. This is not the doctrine of universalism, i.e., that all people would be saved because it is God's nature to save. Rather, the book teaches that God desires that all people worship Him and accepts those who do, regardless of their national or political expressions, as in the freeing of Judah and Jerusalem from their political enemies. Finally, Zechariah preached that God is sovereign over this world, any appearance to the contrary notwithstanding. His visions of the future indicate that God sees all that will happen. The depictions of God's intervention in the world teach that ultimately He will bring human events to the end He chooses. He does not eliminate the individual's freedom to follow God or rebel, but holds people responsible for the choices they make. In the last chapter, even the forces of nature respond to God's control.

**Malachi:** Malachi wrote the words of the Lord to God's chosen people who had gone astray, especially the priests who had turned from the Lord. Priests were not treating the sacrifices they were to make to God seriously. Animals with blemishes were being sacrificed even though the law demanded animals without defect (Deuteronomy 15:21). The men of Judah were dealing with the wives of their youth treacherously and wondering why God would not accept their sacrifices. Also, people were not tithing as they should have been (Leviticus 27:30, 32). But in spite of the people's sin and turning away from God, Malachi reiterates God's love for His people (Malachi 1:1-5) and His promises of a coming Messenger (Malachi 2:17-3:5).