

INTRODUCTION TO THE  
MINOR PROPHETS  
Amos 3:1-8

INTRO: Over the next number of months I want to do 1 or 2 messages on each of the last 12 books of the OT called the minor prophets. One of the major reasons for that is because so many of you are reading through the Bible. I am very, very encouraged with that. And a basic understanding of these 12 books will help you with the major prophets as well. I trust this will be a great asset to you when you read through the Bible. And may I encourage you to memorize the names of these 12 books in their biblical order. One of the very helpful things I did many years ago was to memorize the order of these books, and it helps me almost every time I am looking for one of these books.

Now, one of my fears in preaching through these books is that sometimes I will have to reduce as many as 14 chapters to two messages. It is easier for me to do 14 messages on such a book than two. I have to study enough to do many messages, but have to reduce them to two. And maybe you are thinking its about time I learned to reduce. Well, I haven't accomplished it yet.

It is many years ago that I made a personal outline of each of these books. That will be a great help to me. But now comes all the detailed study, and that will require a lot. So if I cannot keep up, I will have to do something else in between, but I have decided to go for it.

For many years I have pondered Jesus' words in Matthew 24 where He likens the days just before the return of Christ to the days of Noah. Many have taken the view that just as there was abounding wickedness in Noah's day at the flood, so it will be again at the return of Christ. That may be true as well, but I have viewed Jesus as saying that just as it was life as usual just before the flood, they were marring and being given in marriage; so it will be when Christ comes. All will be continuing as normal; eating, drinking, marrying, given in marriage and then, without warning judgment will fall.

Recently, as I was pondering this again, what I saw in a new way was that while they were eating and drinking and carrying on life as usual, dark clouds of judgment were increasingly darkening the sky and they did not see these

clouds. They thought life would never change. They sinned, seemingly with impunity, no judgment, and yet nothing drastic happened. And since sin did not bring judgment the fear of God dissipated. And in the midst of all this was a man with a message of warning, Noah. His message was so strange, it seemed so out of unreal that he was simply laughed off as a little touched in the head. Such were the days of Noah. Such were the days before Israel, the northern kingdom was judged. Such were the days before Judah, the southern kingdom was judged. Such were the days for the Jews when Nazi Germany rose to power. Such are the days today! There is ungodliness on every hand. The clouds are ever increasing. I find the depths to which we have fallen as a nation in my short life time hard to believe. That we would come to the time when in the Evangelical churches we would question homosexuality as acceptable behavior, is staggering. And if it were not that I have spent so much time in the Scriptures, I think I myself would not see where we are.

And today we are in a time when clouds of judgment hang, not over a city, like Ninevah of old, not over a country, like Israel of old or Judah, but over the world. We are in days that are like it was in the days of Noah. And in the OT it was the task of the prophet to break news of impending judgment to a nation. And usually when it comes to the time where it is necessary to warn, the people have their fingers in their ears to that kind of message. The task of the prophet was often fatal.

A few years ago my uncle George was in the hospital. He wasn't eating and it looked like he might not make it this time. A nurse came in one morning and asked him what he would like to eat for breakfast. That is his favorite meal. And he said, "I would like an egg." And the nurse left, but she did not return. Another nurse came in and asked what he would like for breakfast, and he once more asked for an egg. She too disappeared and didn't return. Then the doctor came. He was glad that Uncle George was hungry and asked what he would like for breakfast. And my uncle said, "Is it fatal to ask for an egg?" Well, it was not fatal. He got his egg. But to be a prophet to Israel or Judah, that was often fatal. Many a prophet died for warning a sin sick nation of impending judgment, and such are some of the messages of the minor prophets.

Now, the passage that was read in Amos, 3:1-8, asks a number of questions. I will not take time for all of those here, only to say that in 3:7 it says, "Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets." And it basically says, "God has prophesied, who will not fear? God has spoken, who can but prophecy?"

God has spoken, oh so clearly, but who fears today? We are in the midst of the most incredible time with regard to prophecy that has ever existed, and we have explained it all away with one doctrine, amillennialism. And yet, in just a short time catastrophe of a nature that has never ever happened before will take place. And one of the greatest sins of mankind is no fear of God. The lion has roared, and it has fallen on deaf ears!

**-The office of the prophet:** Now let me say something about the difference between the offices of the priest and the prophet. While the priest was a spokesman to God on behalf of the people, the prophet was a spokesman to man on God's behalf. Alfred Edersheim says, "...the Hebrew term for priest (Cohen) denotes in its root-meaning 'one who stands up for another, and mediates in his cause.'" The priest mediated man's cause to God. It is not hard to like a good priest. He will listen to you and then plead your case before God.

A prophet, on the other hand, is someone who has heard a message from God and speaks to man on God's behalf. Now we usually think of the prophet as one who foretells the future. But that was only one aspect of the prophetic office. The other, probably the major part, is what some have called 'forth-telling'. In other words, the prophet spoke to man on God's behalf and admonished man to amend his ways.

The prophet's work was the most unappreciated ministry. We all like someone who tells us, "I am praying for you." That is the work of the priest. But few like the person who admonishes them about things in their lives that are not in order. And still others do not like it when they are told that bad things are coming, even though it may be true. This was the work of the prophet, and many a prophet died for his work.

Though Abraham and Moses could be called prophets, we generally think of men like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel as prophets. McLintock and Strong say, "We have in the Old

Testament the writings of sixteen prophets; that is, of four greater and twelve lesser prophets. The four greater prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The Jews do not properly place Daniel among the prophets, because (they say) he lived in the splendor of temporal dignities, and led a kind of life different from other prophets. The twelve lesser prophets are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The collectors of the canon arranged the prophets chronologically, but considered the whole of the twelve lesser prophets as one work, which they placed after Jeremiah and Ezekiel, inasmuch as the last three lesser prophets lived later than they."

**-God's purpose for the prophet:** J. Hampton Keathly, in a study of the minor prophets on the internet site, Bible.org says, "Ultimately, the prophetic office found its origin in God's purpose for Israel as a nation through whom all the nations could be blessed. When God gave Israel the Law, He promised them that if they would be obedient, they would become "My own possession" (a [special](#) treasure of His) for the purpose of becoming a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" among all the nations (Compare Ex. 19:5-6 with Deut. 4:6-8). This purpose could not happen, however, if they followed the beliefs and ways of the nations. In preparation for their entrance into the land just before the death of Moses, the illegitimate and demonic methods used by the nations to discern the future or the divine will, called divination, was thoroughly condemned by the Lord through Moses (Deut. 18:9-14). So how, then, was God's will to be known?"

Well, look at Deuteronomy 18:9-14 (read). Now let me here sound a warning. You see, we say, "Well, that is terrible. That is the way the heathen did things way back then." No, that is the way many well dressed American businessmen and others are doing things right now. The NAM is nothing but the Old Age Movement. Today, in the NAM we are relearning all these old practices. And through such things as contemplative prayer, it is making its way right into the church. And, this is NOT how God's will is made known!

So, verses 15-22 then tell us how God's will was to be made known to Israel (read). And today, in the writings of Scripture we have made known to us the will of God. A study of these minor prophets will show us just how up to date these old writings are.

**-Meaning of the name 'minor prophets':** Now, when we speak of the 'major prophets', we are making reference to the longer prophetic books. When we speak of the minor prophets, we do not mean that they are of less significance or any such thing, but that their writings were generally shorter in length.

**-The two kingdoms of Israel:** Now when we speak of the prophets, you will hear things like, "This prophet spoke to the northern kingdom and that prophet spoke to the southern kingdom." Or you will hear of the king of Judah or the king of Israel. Or you will read of Ephraim. Let me briefly explain as that is important to an understanding of these books.

About 2000 years after creation, God called a man by name of Abram, whose name later became Abraham. With Abraham began the people later known as the people of Israel. Abraham's son that carried on this line of people was Isaac and Isaac's son that carried this line on was Jacob. And Jacob wrestled with the angel of the Lord and was thereafter named Israel, meaning 'prince with God'. And from him comes the name of the Jewish people known as Israel.

Well, God brought Israel to the land of Canaan that later came to be known as Israel as well, because it was the land of the people of Israel. And when the people had settled in Israel, they eventually begged God for a king and God granted them their first king. Because they begged for a king prematurely, God granted them a king from the tribe of Benjamin by name of Saul. This took place almost 1000 years after God called Abraham and which was about 1000 years before Christ.

Well, Saul ruled for about 40 years and after his death king David began to rule and he too ruled about 40 years. We are now under 1000 years before the time of Christ. During the reigns of those kings Samuel was the prophet of Israel. His prophetic office though, was more like that of Abraham and Moses. And after David died, Solomon, David's son by Bathsheba became king. He also reigned some 40 years and when Solomon died, the kingdom of Israel divided. You will need to remember this in these messages on the minor prophets.

When the kingdom of Israel divided, Rehoboam, son of Solomon, became king of the southern kingdom. The southern kingdom refers to the southern end of the land of Israel, the end in which Jerusalem lay. Jeroboam became king of the northern kingdom, that is the northern part of the land of Israel.

Of the ten northern tribes, Ephraim was a large and influential tribe and so the northern kingdom is sometimes called 'Ephraim'. So Ephraim is usually a reference to the northern kingdom.

**-Message of gloom and doom:** Now, it may be felt sometimes that the prophets were messengers of gloom and doom only. But through them also comes the message of salvation and deliverance. Isaiah spoke of the time when the wolf and the lamb will feed together. Through the prophets came the message of the hope of the Messiah.

Of the 12 minor prophets, 9 end with a happy ending for Israel; Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. And Habakkuk ends with a happy ending for the prophet, though nationally they will experience much difficulty.

**-Types of prophecy:** There is another important matter to have some understanding of when it comes to the writings of the prophets. Some prophecy is written in a highly specialized manner. For example, most literature is interpreted in the normal literal manner. That holds true for prophecy as well. Let me liken literature to contents held in a container that have a cap or lid that you twist onto the container. These caps and containers may be of all different sizes and styles, but they open in one basic way, you twist the cap off by turning it counter clockwise. You can get at the contents by twisting the lid or cap counterclockwise and the container will allow you access to the contents. Let me show you. (Bottle with twist off cap.) Most literature allows you to understand its contents by using this key: Interpreting it in the normal literal sense.

But, there is some literature that cannot be understood like that. Figures of speech require special tools. This is true for some prophetic literature as well. It is just like some containers that are designed so you need a special tool to get at the contents. Let me give you an example

from my younger years. You could buy canned meats, and they were sealed in a tin container. And on the container was a special little tool with a little slot, and you inserted a little tab on the tin into the tool and then wound the tool round and round and it would open the tin. That was a container that could not be opened in the normal way. Well, I went to the grocery store in town and you wouldn't believe it, they still make those kinds of tins (Show). It takes a specialized tool to get at the contents. Just so it is with some kinds of prophecy.

So, normally prophecy is written in the future tense. Turn to Joel 3 (read 18-21). Now it is not hard to understand that this is prophetic. In Matthew 24:4-5 Jesus said, "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many." It does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that this is prophetic.

But, there are more types of prophecy. For example, go now to the minor prophet Hosea chapter 11 (read 1). Now it does require some understanding of the special species of prophecy to understand this one. And maybe even now you are saying, "How can this be prophetic? It looks like history to me. It is written in the past tense." And you are right. We find this history in Exodus 4:22-23. And yes, it is written in the past tense. But this event will repeat itself in Christ. This historic event becomes a picture of another event in the future. So, go to Matthew 2 (read 13-15). I call this kind of prophecy 'historical prophecy'. So we have prophecy which is written in the future tense. Then we have prophecy that is written in the past or present tense.

But there are more kinds. There is one kind of prophecy sometimes called telescopic prophecy. This kind of prophecy sees two events that look like one, or two events that appear they will happen one right after the other, but they are separated by long periods of time. This species of prophecy, as I see it, is of two types. One is where two or more separate events are given and one, the way it is written, seems to indicate that one event will immediately follow the other, but in fact much time elapses between the two events. Turn with me to Isaiah 61 (read 1-3). Now go to Luke 4 (read 18).

Now if you noticed carefully, Jesus only quoted half of the prophecy. He spoke only of the deliverance section. He left the judgment section out all together. Why? Because it is a telescopic prophecy. The first part of the prophecy is fulfilled 2000 or more years before the last part of the prophecy. And in those 2000 years, we have the Church age.

Then there is the kind of telescopic prophecy where the prophet sees one event but it happens twice. Go with me to Isaiah 7 (read verse 14-16). Now that prophecy was first fulfilled in Isaiah's day. A woman that was a virgin at the time the prophecy was given would later give birth to a child, and before that child knew to refuse evil and choose good, the land would be forsaken by both her kings. That happened in Isaiah's day. But go now to Matthew 1 (read verse 22-23).

Let me give you an illustration of how this kind of prophecy works. This illustration was used by one of my teachers who had lived in Alaska. He said that from Alaska you can see Islands belonging to Russia. And when you look across the ocean you see, what looks like one island. But it is in fact two. He said that some days fog would move in between the two islands and now you could only see the closer, smaller island. This one was in the United States. But when the fog moved out again, the island once more looks bigger, and that bigger section belonged to Russia. So it is with this type of prophecy. It looks like one event, but it is in fact separated by much time.

Those are a few examples of prophecies that need a special tool to open one's understanding to them. So, when we come to these types of prophecy we cannot understand them without the special tools or understanding required to reveal their contents. It will be helpful for us to understand these few basics before we begin our study of the minor prophets.

**-Prophecy, greatest proof that the Bible is the Word of God:** Then, let me say a word about Bible prophecy since one of the tasks of the prophet was to foretell the future. I have done a message several times I called, "Ten Proofs That The Bible Is The Word Of God." One of the greatest of all proofs is biblical prophecy. When you read the Koran, it is not at all like the Bible with regard to prophecy. The Bible prophesied the coming of Christ, His death, burial and resurrection and gave many details of that. When



I give evidence to an unbeliever about the veracity of the Bible I begin something like this, "Do you know who our next Prime Minister will be?" And, of course they do not know. Then I give them a few prophecies and say, "Could anybody but God know such things?"

**-The length of time before prophetic fulfillment:** Now let me explain one more matter before we close this introductory message that I think will be helpful to understand. The prophets spoke many, many times of the day of the Lord or the day of trouble that we refer to as the tribulation time. Then they spoke many, many times of the millennium, the day when the Messiah would rule on earth. And here is my question: Why have so many years passed, over 2400, and those prophecies have not yet been fulfilled?

I have told you numerous times that I believe that to understand the doctrine of the Church is as important to understanding the timing of the rapture as an understanding of eschatology, end time teaching. Well it helps understand this too. Here is what happened. First came the 400 silent years as the world was being prepared for the coming of the Messiah, the Christ. And when He came, He was rejected by His own people and a new time period began, the time of the Church. The time of the Church will add another 2000 years to the 400 silent years.

Turn to Acts 15. The Apostle Paul had been busy planting churches. The Church age had just begun. And there was some trouble in the churches. The question was, just how much of OT law applied to the Church? And some Jews said that all believers had to be circumcised etc... and it created a problem. So Paul and Barnabas took this to the apostles at Jerusalem and this is what took place. We'll read verses 12-18 (read).

We are now very near to the end of the Church age and God's program for Israel is already ready, as the Jews are back in their land. And so now we, like Israel, are just before that time that we will read of in the minor prophets called the Day of the Lord. Like the day in Jewish reckoning, it begins with the night, the tribulation, and ends in the light, the millennium. So largely, it is the time of the Church age that has caused so much time to elapse before the fulfillment of many of these prophecies. Those prophecies are especially directed to Israel, and after the

Church is raptured, God's time-clock for these prophetic events will once more begin to tick.

And so, with that brief introduction, for the next while, Lord willing, we will give time to these last 12 books of the OT.