

Bearded Men - The Minor Prophets - Introduction

The Minor Prophets

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This morning as we begin our message, a message not for just today, but an entire message series through a portion of the Bible, I want to take you back to a time in my life that was very memorable. When I was a young child I was blessed. I grew up in a Christian home. I grew up in a family that made church attendance and the ministries of the church a very regular part of our life. And for six years of my life, from first grade through sixth grade I was a part of a very specific ministry at my church known as Bible Drill. If you are not familiar with Bible Drill, it is a program, it is a ministry, where young people and they even have it for adults now, come together and study a certain set of Scriptures every year. And alongside of that they study certain key passages in the Bible and they learn to handle the Word of God. They learn to memorize the Word of God. And at the end of every year there is a series of competitions. There is a church competition. There is an associational or a community competition and, yes, there is even a state championship when young people go and display their knowledge of the Word of God. They display their knowledge and their way of handling the Word of God.

And when you get to one of the competition levels, one of the things that takes place is that you go in groups of about 12 and get behind a line and perform a series of what they call "calls." And during these calls they will ask you to quote a certain verse or they will ask you to turn to a specific passage in the Bible. It is at that point when they give you the go signal that you have 10 seconds in order to complete what they have asked you to do.

This morning I thought we would have a little fun and do a little miniature amateur Bible Drill competition of our own. In those days when I would go to Bible Drill competition, we would have a Bible in our hands. We would go to "Attention." It would be at our side. We would do what they call "Present Bible." We would put it in front of us, unopened, with a hand both on the top and on the bottom. And in just a few moments I thought we would have fun in asking you to go and find certain passages in the Bible.

Now I know what some of you are thinking. Well, Jeff, I have an electronic Bible on my phone. This is going to be easy. No, no, not so fast. Turn the app off and when I say go, you can turn the app on and then go searching for it.

Now some of you realize that is not going to be faster than doing it the old fashioned way. If you did not bring a paper copy of the Bible there should be one in the pew rack in front of you.

Ok, so here is what we are going to do. We are going to have some fun this morning. So if you have a Bible that is paper based get it out. If you are going to go on your phone... some of you with phones are going searching for other Bibles. I know how this is.

All right. Here we go. So everybody Present Bibles. Put it right in front of you. Do not have a finger in it. Do not have it open. Miss Becky has a 10 second clock ready to go. When you find the passage of Scripture, just simply raise your hand, ok?

Now I realize you are seated a lot further than I can see. This would not be the time to lie. Ok? This is not the time. Here we go. Are you all ready? I want you to find the book of Amos. I did not say Go. Stop. No. See, you have to understand how to do this. So here we go. Bibles in front, not open. Book of Amos. Go. You have got 10 seconds. Go. The countdown clock is going. 10 seconds, a few hands are already up. Some of you got lucky. You just turned right to it, right? And there goes the buzzer. Ah, ok. We have a few hands that went up. Very good, very good.

All right. Hands down. I am not going to ask you to verify or validate. I am going to simply trust you. All right, now, once again, Present Bibles in front of you. Do not open them. You do not have a thumb in it anywhere. The book of Zephaniah.

I didn't say Go. Stop. No. Go. You have got 10 seconds. Zephaniah.

The clock is ticking. Half way done. Got a few hands up there. And... There goes the buzzer. Ok, good job. A little better with Zephaniah.

All right. We are going to do one last one. Do not have your fingers or a book mark or anything in your Bible. Have one hand on the bottom, one hand on the top. Have you all noticed that apps do not work well with Bible Drill at this point? Here is the last one of the day. Are you ready? Obadiah. Go.

It is one page in length unless you have an incredibly large print Bible. It is only 21 verses. You are halfway done. And buzzer. Times up.

I saw the look of exasperation on some of your faces, of I am not even trying. Finding one page out of the whole thing.

Yeah, the reason that I did that today was not my intention to show you how illiterate we are in finding books of the Bible. The purpose today was to show you that over the course of the next few weeks and months we are going to study a portion of Scripture known as the Minor Prophets. All of the calls that I gave you are found in the last 12 books of the Bible. Although these guys are known as the minor prophets, do not think of them in terms of minor as far as the message is concerned or the quality, but rather the quantity. When you compare them to men like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel whose books of the Bible are great in length, these individuals tend to have a much shorter passage of Scripture.

For example, Obadiah is just one page, 21 verses in length. And over the course of studying what we know as the minor prophets we have entitled this message series: Bearded Men. Why? Because when you think of a prophet, when you think of an individual whom God used in the role of a prophet, we think of a guy like John the

Baptist, a guy who came out with, you know, wearing material made out of a camel skin and eating locusts and having kind of a long-haired, big beard, a gruff voice. Really that is that persona of the prophets that we want to capture as we study these individuals this summer series. Why? Because I believe that the message that they have for us is so perfect, so strategic and so important for us to understand.

Now today we are not going to be in a specific passage of Scripture. Toward the end of the message we will actually be in a New Testament passage in the book of 1 Peter chapter 4. But today what I want to do is to look at Hosea through Malachi, these 12 minor prophets and look at what is the common denominator, what is the common strain, what does every single one of them have in common so that we can build a foundation upon which this entire series is going to be built. And to do so I want to ask some very key strategic questions, much like an investigative journalist would; the who and the whats and the whens. So let's begin with the first question.

Who are the minor prophets? And the answer to this question is they are the part-time prophets. And what I mean by "part time," putting that in quotations is: unlike the major prophets these were not the individuals who spent their entire lives in the office as a prophet. For example, when you study Isaiah and you study Jeremiah and Ezekiel, you get the idea that if you had gone to them on any day of the week and said, "What do you do for a living?" They would have said, "I am a prophet of God." That is what they did 24/7. It is who they were. It is what they were called to do, multiple generations of saying thus says the Lord. Whom we know as the minor prophets typically had a profession or a livelihood or an existence in which the prophecies that they gave were not the primary objective. And what the Lord does in these individuals' lives is very strategic and offers a very strategic message.

When we think of the backgrounds of whom we know as the minor prophets, there are a couple of them who had life-long ministries, Micah and Hosea for example. Hosea about 60 years and Micah about 40 years. But as you study who these individuals were, they were not primarily prophets. In fact, those two men primarily were priests of God. It was their role to maintain the daily worship function of whom we know as the people of Israel.

You know, there are seven major religious feasts in the Jewish calendar, from Passover to the feast of Tabernacles and all the others. What they would do is their job was to prepare for these feasts and to take care of the people and to facilitate the sacrifices. And so a priest's daily duty was so consumed with facilitating other people's spiritual needs, you don't see the priests running around saying, "Thus saith the Lord."

However, there is the person of Hosea and there is the person of Micah who the Lord would all out very strategically at points in their life to give a prophetic message.

Then you deal with a man such as Amos. In fact, in the book of Amos 7:14 he makes it very clear. He says, "I am not a prophet. I am not the son of a prophet. I am a herdsman from Tekoa." Basically he lived in a southern portion of what we know as the holy land.

God called him to go to the northern region and to speak a very specific message. When you study his life you get the idea that he was a one-hit wonder. He went up there one time with one message and that was it. His livelihood was being a herdsman.

And my personal favorite was Obadiah. Not my favorite because it is the shortest. Not my favorite because it is only 21 verses, but Obadiah most likely, whether you categorize him as minor or major, was the first prophet.

Let me share with you why I enjoy that. Number one, it is almost as if God gave us one page of instructions, 21 verses and we didn't do them so he had to give us another 500 pages with all the other prophets, ok? He was the first one. But the thing I love most about Obadiah, I cannot verify this 100 percent, the Scripture does not refer to it, but historically and traditionally, it is believed that he was a waiter. His livelihood was spent taking food from a kitchen to a banquet hall. And the reason this is so significant for us, is the minor prophets open for us the possibility of what I call a pew revival. And we need a pew revival in our community and in our culture.

Let me share with you what a pew revival is. There are times week in and week out whether here in a physical location or by way of technology and the internet that you will hear from this pulpit here at this church; possibly you even spend time listening to other messages and other Bible studies and other places, and that is fine. How many times do you hear the Word of God spoken or hear somebody teach a Bible study or preach a sermon and you hear something that goes completely against the culture? You hear something that goes completely against what you would like to hear. It just kind of goes against the grain in your life.

Actually one of the expressions is to say, "Well, of course that is what he would say. He is the pastor. Of course that is what they believe. I mean they are the preacher. After all, we should expect them to say that. We should expect them to live that way. We should expect them to have that standard, but they don't understand my life is different." And sometime sitting 50 feet away or 100 feet away or thousands of miles away by way of technology, we get this chasm or we get this gap that comes in our lives where we begin to say, "Well, of course, that is what we expect from the pastor." But what we see is someone who is a waiter, someone who is a herdsman, someone who was sitting on the pew next to them who nudges them and says, "Hey, do you realize that your life is off center? Do you realize that this needs to be adjusted? Do you understand you have this deficiency in your life?"

See, sometimes we have problems with authority, don't we? We struggle with those who are in authority in our lives and we say, "I don't care what you think. I don't care what you say." Of course you wouldn't say it because that is who you are. But when our neighbor, when our coworker, when someone in our class, someone who lives with us says, "Hey, please pay attention, you life is in error in this way," All of the sudden we take a step back and say, "Wow, I guess I should pay closer attention." That is the who of the minor prophets. These are individuals who lived among those who heard their message. These are the people who had jobs just like they had and experiences just like

they had and families just like they had who said, "Hey, here is what God says. This is your deficiency. You need to marry those two and fix the problem." That is the who.

The second question that we have to ask is this. When did they prophesy? When did these guys exist? If you want to do a chronological study you have got about 500 years, about half a millennium between Obadiah and Malachi. And we could go into all kinds of studies of the different governments and the different rulers and the different geographical places, but what you need to hear, what you need to understand is they lived and they preached and the prophesied in a world that was very pluralistic. Now let me break down what that word means for you. Plural, more than one. You and I live in a very pluralistic world. We live in a world today that supposedly advocates, and it blows my mind that some of the most academic, most mentally courageous and brilliant people advocate, what we know as pluralism.

Let me share with you what pluralism is. It is a fundamental idea that two things or two concepts or two philosophies that oppose each other can both be correct at the same time. Now let me tell you how that breaks down. That means in our society, in our culture, we live among people who say it is okay to believe in Jesus, but Mohammed is of equal value. The problem there is they had two different messages. We live in a world today where Jesus said he was the only way. C. S. Lewis, the great apologist, put it best. Either Jesus is Savior for all or he is Savior for none. And we live in a world that says, "Well, of course, you can have any god you want, any faith you want. It doesn't matter." We live in a pluralistic world. They are all the same. It makes about as much sense as saying somebody is a married bachelor. You cannot have it. Either one or the other is correct. Both cannot be accurate.

Well, when you go to the minor prophets it doesn't matter if it was the ninth century BC or the fifth century BC, all along the way they are ministering. They are prophesying. They are speaking to a culture that it was very pluralistic. But what you need to understand about the pluralism of their day that is eerily similar to the pluralism of our day. It is not that the Israelites were saying, "Well, Yahweh and Baal are of equal worth." They weren't saying that. It is not that they were saying, "Well, Yahweh and Ashtoreth and the female deity in Baal worship, they are equal." No, it wasn't big picture pluralism. It was small picture pluralism. Let me share with you the pluralism of the minor prophets' days. It was a pluralism that said in our vernacular you worship God on Sunday and do what ever you want to on Monday, that your life and what you say do not have to match the life that you ought to live. We would call it hypocrisy. Amos the minor prophet comes to them and says, "How dare you go to church and sin." In other words, you cannot live a hypocritical life. You cannot live a life that has two sets of rules, one rule when you are in a "religious" environment and one rule when you are in a "non-religious" environment. We think that in our world today that is ok. We compartmentalize life. But the minor prophets came along and said, "No, no, no. You cannot. You have to be consistent. You have to have the same life."

Pluralism does not work. We live in a world today where you would have to agree with me. It has become very difficult to distinguish the believers in Jesus Christ Monday

through Saturday. Our lives, our words, our habits, our endeavors, our adventures tend to be very indistinguishable and non-particular. And the minor prophets come to us and say, "Hey, you cannot live a life of pluralism. That is why Jesus spoke his most harsh words to the Pharisees." They were the religious hypocrites of their day who when they were in the temple acted one way, when they were in the market place they acted another way. There could probably not be another or a better time in history to study this concept than what we know the 21st century. Why? We are a pluralistic culture that believes that you can act different ways at different times and somehow that is ok. The minor prophets come on and say, "No, no. That is not how it is to operate."

So we looked at who they are. They are part time guys who are sitting on the pew next to us. We have looked at this aspect of a pluralistic life. The next question we need to ask is this. Where did they prophesy? Where did they do their ministering? We could study geography. But we are not going to. Jonah went to Nineveh that was the Gentiles and Amos goes to the north, Hosea to the south and they are all over the map geographically. What I want you to hear is this. That where they prophesied was very strategic. When God led them out, when God called them to go to a specific place, here was the common denominator in every place he called them. They were to go to the people of God.

Now we are going to address Jonah in a couple of weeks when he goes to the Ninevites and how it kind of looks like reverse model, but for all the other guys it doesn't matter if it was Israel in the north, Judah in the south, whoever it was, the Lord went and communicated to the people of God. And here is what you need to hear. This is what needs to be so clear. What God communicated through the minor prophets that we need to hear today is this, that if you want change, if you expect change, if you are sick and tired of the moral fabric, if you are sick and tired of the ethical mores of your culture and your society, rather than pointing fingers at Washington and pointing fingers at somebody across the street, what the minor prophets do is say, "Hey, point the finger back at yourself. You are a person who claims to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. You are a person who claims to be of the people of God. How dare you say that their life needs to change when your life is just as pluralistic. It is just not big pluralism. It is little pluralism."

One of my favorite illustrations in the minor prophets comes from Amos. And the prophet Amos goes up to the northern kingdom and for the sake of continuity I am just going to say a bunch of "ites", because there are Moabites and Jebusites and all these individuals. Amos goes up to the northern kingdom and says, "Do you believe that the ites are a sinful rebellious people?" They said, "Amen, yes, sir, you got it."

He says, "There is another group of "ites" over here. They are contrary to the ways of God. Their lifestyle is contrary. Do you believe that?" They say, "Absolutely." There is another ite group over here. They ignore the Word of God. They say, "Amen, preach it." Then he concludes by saying, "And the Israelites, you have gone against the Word of God." And they go, "Whoa, no. You have done gone to meddling at this point." Why? Because we love to say that the problem is them and the problem is they and not us and not me. And what the minor prophets do for us is they show us very strategically that if

we want the world changed starting right here, then the world has got to change right here first before it changes out there at some other point. And that is what the minor prophets spoke, that those who have the capacity and the ability to see this world change are the people of God.

And you think about that for a moment. In the book of Acts it says that they turned the whole world upside down. And it started with 12 simple apostles. You look just in this room and you take our internet congregation and it goes out so much further: The capacity that we have to see the world changed if we would allow our world to be changed. And, see, that leads to the how. How is it that the minor prophets spoke.

We have talked about who they are. We talked about where they went but how did they speak? They spoke very pointedly. Now I am going to give you a warning weeks in advance. Over the course of the next weeks and months, and we study the minor prophets, if you expect or if you want or if you desire to quote come to church and feel all these gushy feelings and sing Kumbya and everything is good and fine and dandy, this is the wrong place. Why? Because the message of the minor prophets were there is a very strategic issue that must be dealt with.

And when I say that it was pointed, this is not going to be a “make friends and influence people” kind of message series. This is not going to be the, hey, we just had our “best life now” message series. This is there is an issue and there is a problem and something needs to be addressed.

Let me give you a medical illustration. Let’s just say for the sake of illustration that I was having issues. I was having pains in the torso part of my body. And I went to a surgeon and said, “Doc, here is what I need you to do. I need you to take care of my torso. Something is wrong. I need you to fix this.”

He says, “Well, what is the problem?”

I said, “It doesn't really matter. Just anywhere on the torso, start slashing. Go for it.”

We would have all kinds of issues. However, as you understand the torso has so many arteries and so many organs and so many very specific items that it can take just one small issue to make everything else work improperly. For example, those who have cardiac issues, those who have heart problems, you know there are these things called arteries that give blood to your heart and you have to have your heart, right? And in those arteries there are times where cholesterol or plaque or whatever you want to call it, begins to build up. And it can take a very small artery and a very small build up to cause a whole lot of problems for the rest of your entire body. That is exactly how the minor prophets are going to speak to us over the course of the next couple of months. There are going to be times where it looks really tiny to you, but God is going to bring it to your attention because it is really big to him.

Often times in our physical bodies the most dramatic events happen in the smallest areas.

We are going to see in our spiritual lives sometimes the most dramatic events happen in the smallest of places. So just as a word of warning as we study the minor prophets, they are going to be very strategic. They are going to be used almost as if God is going to bring a scalpel out.

You know, I don't think it is ironic that the Word of God in the book of Hebrews 4 calls itself a two-edged sword for the dividing of the bone and marrow, the dividing of the Spirit and the soul. And that is what God is going to do in our lives. He is going to take these individuals that are very relevant to today and begin to carve out and say, "That doesn't need to be there and that needs to be added and we need to adjust this."

Which leads to the last question. And it is really the most important. It is the what question. We have talked about these guys or where they went, how they did what they did. But what is the general message? Over the course of the next weeks whether it is Hosea, whether it is Amos, whether it is Nahum or Jonah, we are going to see very specific strategic messages. But across the board what is it that these guys communicated? Here it is. There is a problem that desperately needs to be addressed, because just like in your physical body, if you do not address that problem it will cause the deterioration of the body. Spiritually speaking allow me to be this blunt. What we know as the Church of Jesus Christ, what we know as the people who claim to be believers in Jesus Christ, we have a major issue and problem among us and it is this. That as a large portion we as an entire body internationally have become almost completely inept. What I mean by that is the world is gaining more ground than we are. The message of the world is gaining more steam than the message of Jesus Christ. And that is the problem. And how do we address it? After all, the message is to us, right? And the first thing we need to understand on the what is this. We have got to grasp—and we will see all of this in the minor prophets, the character of God.

Remember, I mentioned pluralism. You do realize that when we talk about the characteristics of God, the first thing we have to address is what we call his omniscience. Do you know what that means? It means he knows everything. There is nothing that we can hide from God. He is aware of every aspect of our lives. How easy is it for us to live a double life or a double standard and say, "Well nobody knows about this and only a certain select people are aware of this."

No, no, no. God is absolutely omniscient. He is not only omni knowledgeable, omniscient, he is omnipresent, which means this. He is everywhere.

I have got some interesting news for some of you. God is not just in this building. God is not just on this property. He is everywhere. In fact, King David makes this statement. If I go to the highest mountain you are there. If I go to the depths of hell you are there. There is nowhere I can go to out run who and where you are. We have got to grasp that we know who God is he knows everything about us and he is everywhere we go, we cannot out run him. We cannot evade him. We cannot get around him. We cannot lock ourselves in a room and say, "Whoo, got away from him for just a moment."

And last, but not least, on his character, is the fact that he is all powerful, omnipotent. You know that means that he formed us. He sustained us and, to quote a lot of moms in the room, he can take us out. That being said, do you understand that when we address our rebellion, when we address our going against the things of God, we are dealing with a God who is all knowing everywhere and all powerful and yet we are still breathing. We are still living. We are still being allowed to function. You say, "How is that?" Because he is merciful and he gives us grace. So we need to understand his character. The second thing we need to understand is this, what I call the continuation or the consistency of his Word. You know one of the great things about a testimony is when it is validated by a second or a third witness. Every one of these minor prophets prophesied alongside of the major prophets. In other words, Isaiah is out saying what he is saying and Joel is coming right along beside him and saying the same thing. So it is not like you have different messages being communicated. You have the same message being said, just from a different source.

One of the things that we fall into the trap of in our culture today is we read passages in the Bible, in particular, but even the Old Testament, and we will say, "You know, that was 2500 years ago. That was 3000 years ago. It is just not relevant for today." Let me share with you something. God has not updated. God has not revised and God has not changed his Word. In other words, his standard for them is his standard for us. His expectation for them is his expectation for us. And our problem is we think we have outsmarted God. We think we have gotten wiser. We have out educated him and let me share with you the truth is he knows what he is doing. It is our opportunity to get on the same page as he. We are going to see the consistency whether they go to the north, to the south, to Nineveh, wherever they go, that God's Word does not vary and it does not change.

Which leads to the third one. There is a cry for repentance. You know, the word repentance has all kinds of connotations, but it simply means this, to be walking the wrong direction, to stop, turn around and head the right direction. And that is the message that the prophets are going to give us in light of the character of God, in the light of the consistency of his Word. When we the people of God realize that our lives are not in conjunction with God, we are not on the same page, we are not headed where he wants us to go, that we are to stop and turn around and go the opposite direction.

You are going to see the word repent over and over. Why? Because that is what we need to do. We need to stop heading the wrong direction and start heading the right direction, which leads to the last, and the final, and most important aspect of what these guys communicate to us. The consequence of rebellion, the consequence of sin, the reality of what happens in our life if we do not subject ourselves to the character of God, if we do not submit ourselves to the consistency of his Word, if we do not repent.

Let me share with you about our culture at large and then I will get to us as individuals. We as a culture, when you study our morals and our ethics and our values and our philosophy, are a train that is headed off the cliff and we are picking up speed every

single day. The minor prophets and we in the next couple of months are going to basically hold up the sign and say, "Stop. Put the brakes on. Turn around." But if we continue to go forward, then the consequences of our sin, the consequences of our rebellion will naturally take place.

Let me share with you an illustration that happened in our very home just in the last days. And I never want to expose anybody in my family using an illustration that pinpoints them, but it is about the youngest person in the home, so I will just leave it at that. Yesterday we were going through an annual ritual in the Meyer's house. You know that when you have got four boys including myself and Traci that cleanliness is not necessary next to godliness in our home. And so about once a year Traci has had enough. And it is time to clean out, particularly the garage. The garage is the area where all the boys' toys are and all their stuff. There are things that are broken that we didn't know about that need to be discarded. There are items that are dead that need to be eradicated. I mean, there is stuff everywhere.

So we go through this intense process and we are working. We are literally working hours and everybody is participating. But there was at this one point where all of the boys had began to kind of play in the driveway and to be quite honest with you, it was ok. We hadn't asked them to do anything specific. Take a little break. Traci and I were in another part. And at one very specific, strategic moment, I called out to one of my children. I am not naming names, but he is the youngest. And I said, "Come here." What did he do? He chased the ball that he was playing with first, then decided it was important to come where I was." Let me share with you what I communicated to him, because this is the message we need to heed in the minor prophets. I am the dad. He is the son. We make the parallel. He is God and we are his children. I communicated very specifically not just to him, but to our entire family how do you know what I was telling you to come here for? Maybe there was a rabid pit bull streaking across the yard and I was trying to get you into safety. Maybe a car had run off the road and I was trying to pull you away from harm and danger. And that is the struggle that we have when God shows us something that needs to happen in our life. We say, "Oh, God, hold up. Let me finish this first."

You know, there was a guy in the Old Testament by the name of Pharaoh. And one of the plagues was the plagues of the frogs. The frogs were everywhere. They were dying and they were stinking. And Moses comes to him and says, "Pharaoh, do you want rid of the frogs?" He said, "I sure do." He said, "When do you want rid of them?"

Do you know what Pharaoh said? "Tomorrow." One more night with the frogs.

How many times are we caught doing that in our own life? We say, "God, I understand I need to be where you want me, but let me finish this first. Let me experience this first. Let me enjoy this first." And we don't know that in the love and the care of a earthly father, he is actually drawing us to him to protect us and to communicate with us and yet our natural response is, but I have got to finish this first.

See, the minor prophets are going to call to us and say, “You know what? When God calls us to change and he calls us to repentance, understand that one more night and one more day and one more week and one more relationship and one more whatever could be the final step that takes the train over the cliff or the final place that takes us into harm’s way.

And so in conclusion, please understand the minor prophets’ message, it is very pointed. It is very strategic. In a way it is going to be kind of crass and curt. But it is absolutely necessary, if we want life to be what we really desire it to be, to yield ourselves to the one who formed and fashioned us, to say we just want to be where you want us to be.