

Major Lessons From Minor Prophets

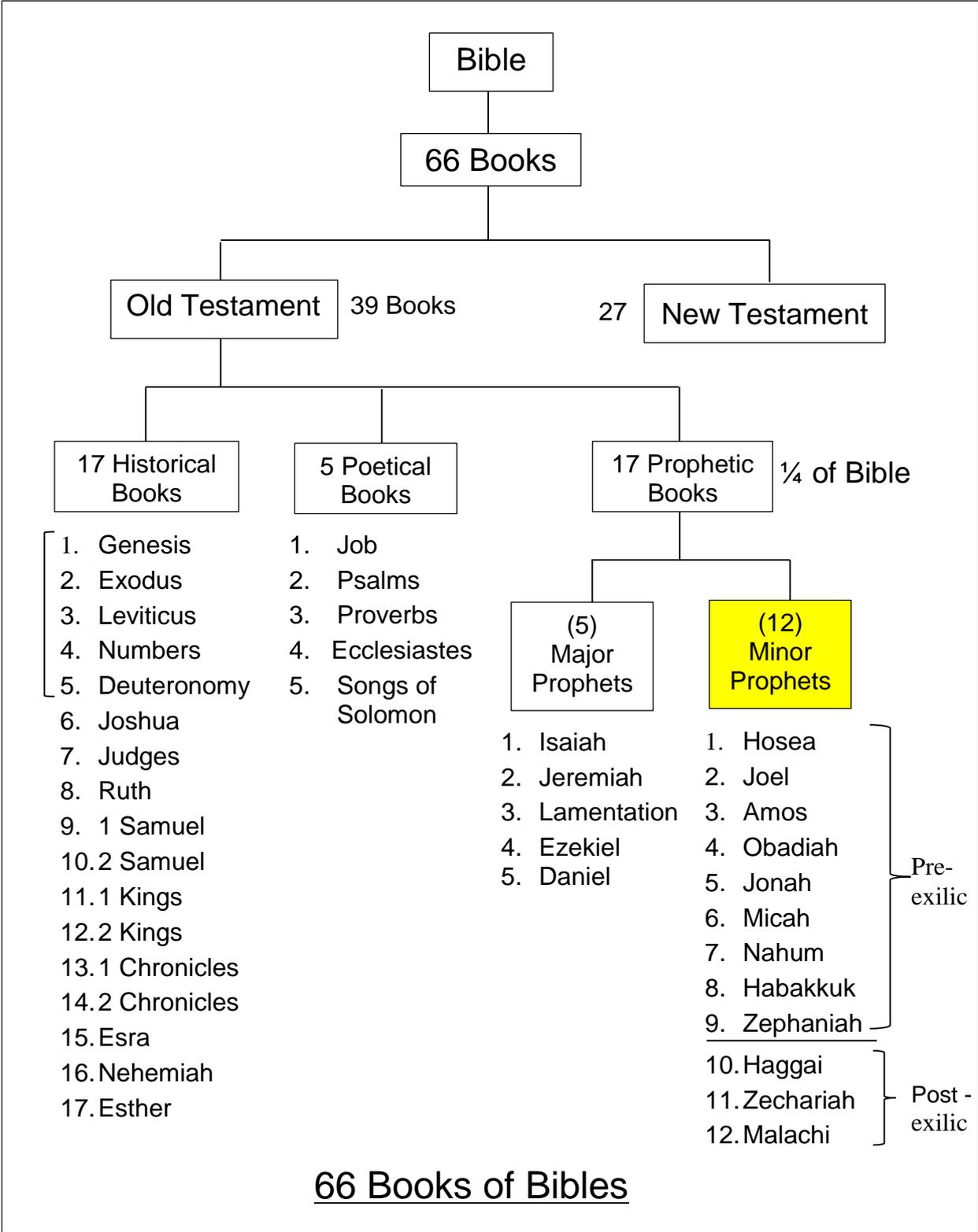
by Tan Sin Liang

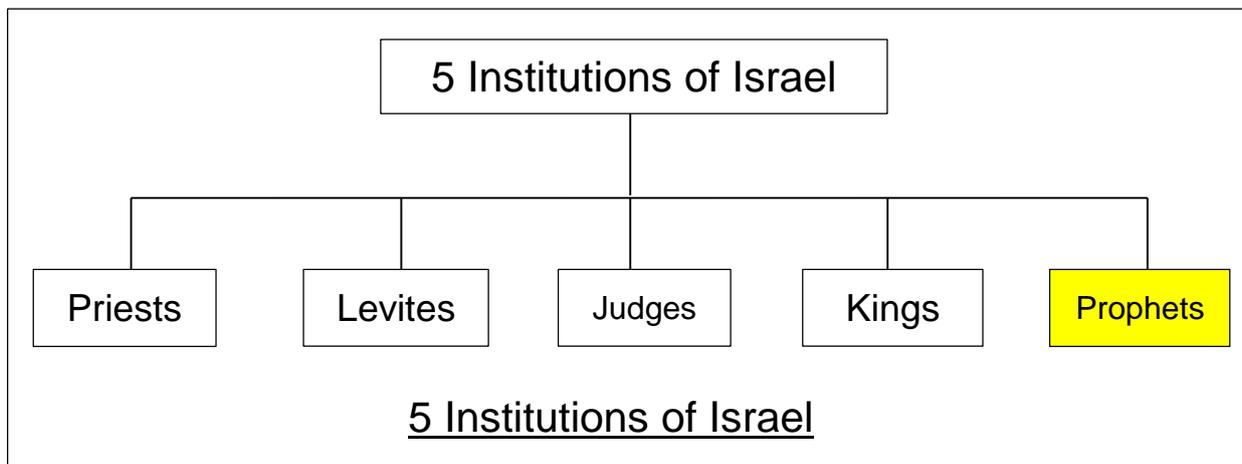


Median soldiers in the service of the royal Persian guard as shown on a relief made of glazed bricks found at Susa, one of the Persian administrative centers.

Major Lessons From Minor Prophets

Introduction





12 Minor Prophets

<u>Canonical Order</u>	<u>Chronological Order</u>	<u>Approx. Dates (BC)</u>
1. Hosea	1. Obadiah	840
2. Joel	2. Joel	835
3. Amos	3. Jonah	760
4. Obadiah	4. Amos	755
5. Jonah	5. Hosea	740
6. Micah	6. Micah	730
Fall of Israel to Assyrians – Assyrian Exile (722 BC)		
7. Nahum	7. Nahum	660
8. Habakkuk	8. Zephaniah	625
9. Zephaniah	9. Habakkuk	607
Fall of Judah to Babylonians – Babylonian Exile (605 – 586 BC)		
10. Haggai	10. Haggai	520
11. Zechariah	11. Zechariah	515
12. Malachi	12. Malachi	430

400
Yrs

400 years of Prophets & 400 years of Silence.

- Minor Prophets preached & prophesied for 400 years.
- After last Minor Prophet (Malachi) to New Testament
 - 400 years silence.
- For 400 years God sent Minor Prophets to preach to Israel (to warn them to avert judgment).
- For 400 years, Israel ignored the warnings of these prophets
 - judgment came
 - Israel (Northern Kingdom) was conquered by Assyrians in 722 BC.
 - Judah (Southern Kingdom) was conquered by Babylonians in 586 BC.
 - Jerusalem & Temple of God were destroyed.
 - Israelites exiled to Babylon in 605BC.
- After that, for 400 years God was silent to Israel (after Malachi)
 - no more prophets to foretell the future & to warn them.

3 Fold Message of Prophets

1st : Israel has sinned, how she has sinned

2nd : Consequences of their sins, judgment is certain

3rd : Repent & Return to the Lord (Restoration).

Why are they called “Minor Prophets”?

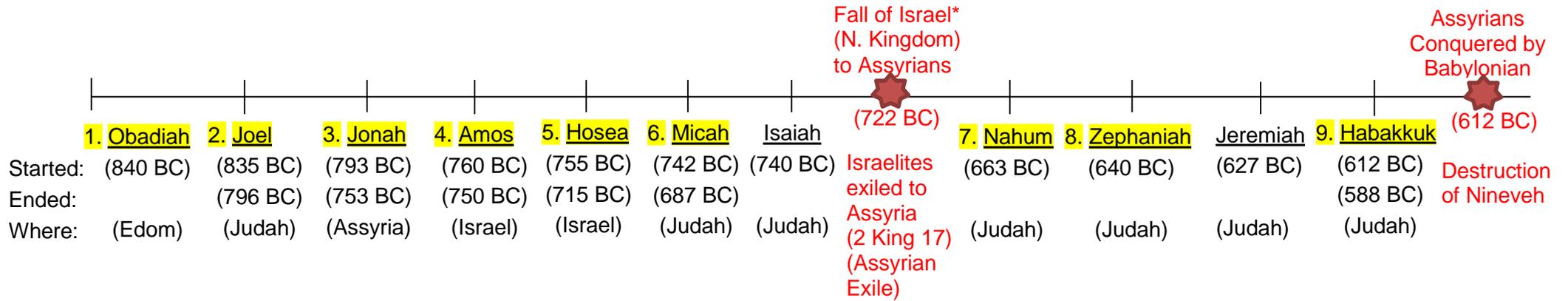
- Is it because they're less important?

Books of 12 Minor Prophets
(67 Chapters)

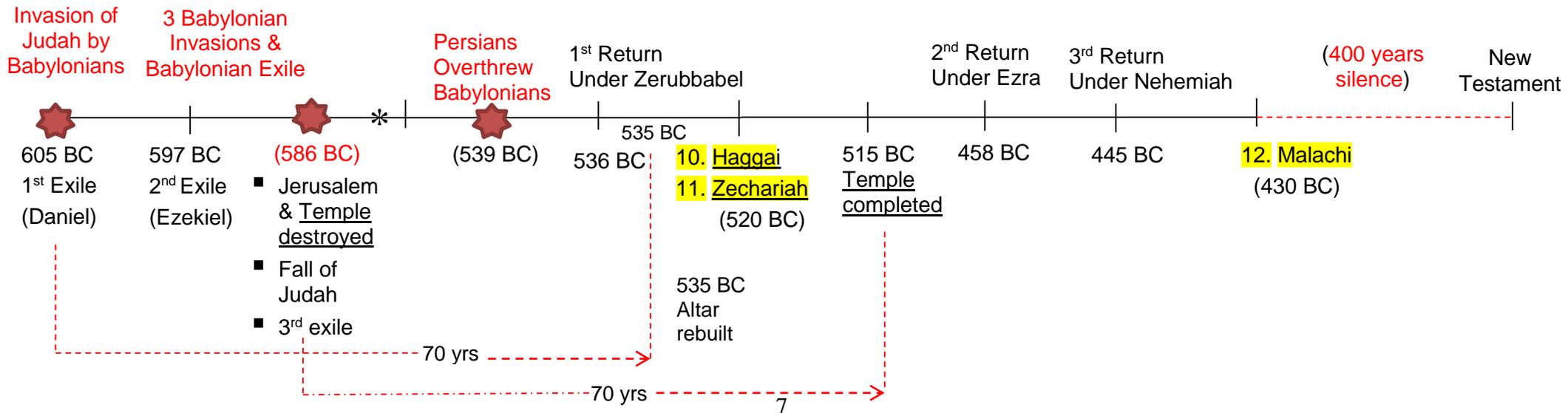
Book of Isaiah.
(66 Chapters)

<u>Books of 12 Minor Prophets</u>			
Pre-Exilic Prophets	1.	*Hosea	14 Chapters
	2.	Joel	3 Chapters
	3.	Amos	9 Chapters
	4.	Obadiah	1 Chapter
	5.	*Jonah	4 Chapters
	6.	Micah	7 Chapters
	7.	*Nahum	3 Chapters
	8.	*Habakkuk	3 Chapters
	9.	Zephaniah	3 Chapters
Post Exilic Prophets	10.	*Haggai	2 Chapter
	11.	Zechariah	14 Chapters
	12.	*Malachi	4 Chapters
*Books we'll be studying		<u>Total: 67 Chapters</u>	

Time-line of Minor Prophets Ministry – Pre & Post Exile



Pre – Exilic Prophets



Post – Exilic Prophets

Important Dates To Remember

(i) Fall of Israel (Northern Kingdom) to Assyrians & Assyrian Exile (722 BC)

- In 722 BC, Israel (Northern Kingdom) was conquered by Assyrians.
- Thus the “judgment” referred to by the prophets (Obadiah, Joel, Jonah, Amos, Hosea & Micah) in their books is the “Assyrian Invasion”.
- God was using the Assyrians (super power then) to punish Israel for their sins.
- After 3 invasions, Assyrians conquered Israel in 722 BC
 - Northern Kingdom (Israel) disappeared.
- The Jews in the Northern Kingdom were exiled to Assyria (Assyrian Exile).
- Prophets like Hosea & Micah saw the fulfillment of their prophecies during their life times
 - Hosea became one of Assyrian refugees
 - where he wrote his books.
- Nineveh became the most powerful city in the world under Assyrian Empire
 - it was supposed to be impregnable & indestructible.
 - that was what Ninevites boasted.
- Prophet Nahum (100 years after Jonah) preached to Nineveh that soon it would be destroyed completely.
- Prophets Zephaniah & Habakkuk preached to Southern Kingdom (Judah) (no more Israel).

Lesson

How does God bring judgment on a nation?

- By using another nation to attack & destroy that nation.
 - God used Assyrians to punish Israel.
 - God used Babylonians to punish Judah.
 - God used Persians to punish Babylonians (wicked) for their excesses esp. destruction of Solomon’s Temple
- Natural disasters
 - floods, earthquake, famine, crop failures,

(ii) **Fall of Judah (Southern Kingdom) to Babylonians, the Babylonian Exiles (605 BC to 586 BC).**

- In year 612 BC, the new super power, the Babylonians, rose and defeated the Assyrians.
- As predicted by prophet Nahum
 - Nineveh was completely destroyed by Babylonians in 612 BC.
- Prophets Zephaniah and Habakkuk predicted that now it will be Judah's turn to be punished for their sins.
- God was going to raise the Babylonians (*Hak 1:6*) to be the new super power to punish Judah.
- After 3 invasions, Judah fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC.
- Started 3 exiles of Jews to Babylon.
 - King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah in 605 BC & deported 1st batch of Jews to Babylon. (Daniel was one of them).
 - 3rd & final exile came when Judah & Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC.

(a) Pre - Exilic Prophets

- Thus the prophets prior to the Babylonian Exiles are called the 'Pre-Exilic Prophets'
- There're 9 Pre-Exilic Prophets (Obadiah, Joel, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah & Habakkuk).
- The Assyrian Exile is ignored.

(b) Post – Exilic Prophets

- Post – Exilic prophets are those prophets after the Babylonian Exiles.
- Because of the Babylonians' excesses (esp. destroying God's Temple) God was going to punish the Babylonians.
 - they, in turn, would be conquered by the Persians
 - Persians were kinder to the Jews in allowing the Jews to return to rebuild the Temple of God

- The prophets who ministered to this group of Jews who returned from Babylon
 - Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi.
 - the challenges faced were quite different from the Pre-Exilic Prophets.

The Breakup of Solomon's Kingdom

- During King Solomon's reign (after King David's death),
 - Israel reached the zenith of its power
 - 40 years of peace & prosperity (Golden Era of Solomon).
- However, after death of King Solomon in 922 BC
 - Solomon's Kingdom was broken into 2 separate nations
 - Israel (or "Ephraim"), Northern Kingdom
 - Judah, Southern Kingdom.

Background to Breakup of Solomon's Kingdom, Israel!

- (i) What happened after King Solomon's death in 922 BC?
- Solomon's son, Rehoboam was appointed King
 - Tribe of Judah & Benjamin accepted Rehoboam as King
 - The other 10 tribes refused.
 - Jeroboam led 10 tribes to revolt against King Rehoboam.
 - This led to the formation of break-away Northern Kingdom of Israel ("Ephraim")
- (ii) Why did Jeroboam & 10 tribes rebel against King Rehoboam?
(2 Chr 10, 1 King 11: 26:40)
- When Solomon died, Jeroboam (who fled to Egypt because Solomon wanted to kill him, prophet Ahijah had prophesied he would be King over Israel after his death)
 - together with 10 tribes of Israel asked Rehoboam not to treat them as harsh as his father did & they pledged to be his loyal subjects.

- The Elders advised Rehoboam to agree to their request. But he also sought advice from his peers who disagreed
 - They told him to treat them harsher than his father, Solomon.
- Rehoboam rejected the Elders' advice & accepted his young peers' advice.
- 10 tribes, under the leadership of Jeroboam, rebelled against King Rehoboam by forming break-away Northern Kingdom of Israel
- Thus because King Rehoboam's foolishness, in rejecting the Elders' advice, the Kingdom of Israel was split into 2 nations
- This led to end of era: 1 King ruling over 12 tribes of Israel

(iii) Result of Breakup of Israel

- 2 independent nations emerged, each with distinct government & national character
- Israel (or Ephraim) was wealthier, more powerful and larger territory.
- Judah was smaller. But it has Jerusalem (as capital) & Temple of God.
- These 2 independent nations were weaker than they were part of Solomon's Kingdom.
- In the end both Israel & Judah were destroyed by foreign super powers.
 - Israel destroyed by the Assyrians
 - Judah destroyed by the Babylonians
- This was God's punishment for Israel & Judah for their unrepented sins

Q: What lesson can we learn from Rehoboam's foolishness?

Prophets

(i) Who are prophets?

- They are called by various names
 - “seers” (perceive things beyond natural realm. Remember Saul?).
 - “watchman” (appointed by God to watch over Israel) (Hosea 9:8)
 - “nabi” (called or appointed by God to proclaim this message).

(ii) What is the role of the prophets?

- What is meant by “prophecy”?
- Prophecy could mean
 - (a) predicting the future
 - while all prediction is prophecy, not all prophecy is prediction
 - prophecy may concern the past, present & future
 - if it concerns the past – it is “forth-telling”
 - if it concerns the present + future – it is “fore-telling”
 - (b) appointed by God to speak on his behalf
 - basically prophets in Bible are “messengers” bringing God’s message (good or bad) to nation of Israel
 - they were the “spokesman” for God.
 - “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth” (*Jer 1:9*)

(iii) Prophets are called

- All the prophets are called or appointed by God Himself.
- They’re all hand-picked by God to undertake a specific assignment.
- Examples

- Jeremiah was called by God to be a prophet even before he was born (*Jeremiah 1: 4-5*).

“Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,
Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.
And before you were born I consecrated you.
I have appointed you a prophet to the nations” (*Jer 1:4-5*)

- Amos was called to be God’s prophet while attending to his sheep in Judah.
- Isaiah was commissioned by God he saw in a vision. God asked: “Whom shall I send & who will go for me?”
- : Isaiah replied: “Here am I, send me.” God replied: “Go and tell this people”.
- So you don’t “volunteer” to become a prophet or “train” to be a prophet.

(iv) True and false prophets

- The Bible has many accounts of false prophets.
- In Jeremiah (Chap 23), you see God condemning false prophets who were not appointed by God.
- in Jeremiah (Chap 28), God killed false prophet Hananiah
- according to Deut 18:20 & Zech 13:3 false prophets must die.
- Examples of false prophets in Jeremiah Chap. 23

- “They speak a vision of their own imagination; not from the mouth of the Lord (v.16)
- “ I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy falsely in my name, saying ‘ I had a dream, I had a dream’” (v.25)
- “Behold, I am against those who prophesied false dreams” declares the Lord.” (v.32). *(Jeremiah 23)*

(v) How can we tell whether prophecy is true or false?

- Tests are laid out in Deut. 13 & Deut. 18:

(a) Whether prophecy come true (Deut 18:22)

- “You may say in your heart, ‘How will we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?’” (v.21)
- “When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, If the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken.” (v.22) (Deut 18:21-22)

- All true prophecies come true.

(b) No contradiction with other established prophecies.

- A true prophecy never contradicts previous prophecy.
- All the 16 prophet’s prophecies came true (some saw fulfillment in their time) and they never contradict each other.

(c) Whether it leads you to God or away from God (Deut.13)

- “Suppose there are prophets among you, or those who have dreams of the future, and they promise you signs and miracles (wonders), and the predicted signs or miracles (wonders) take place. (v.1)
- “If the prophet then say, ‘Come, let us worship the gods of foreign nations.’” (v.2)
- “Do not listen to them. The Lord your God is testing you to see if you love Him with all your heart and soul” (v.4)
- “the false prophets or dreamers who try to lead you astray must be put to death....” (v.5) (Deut 13: 1-5)

- Today there’re false prophets.
- Ask whether he is leading you to God or to himself (self-proclaimed prophet)?
- A true prophet lead you to God, never to himself.

(vi) Lives of prophets

- Prophets in the Bible never led glamorous lives
 - they were unpopular and hated (esp. message is unpopular).

- They led terrible lives – most of the time alone standing against the King & the whole nation.
- Prophets were often seen as traitors (rather than God's spokesman) because often they spoke against the Kings.
- Their lives were constantly threatened, even with death.
- In Jeremiah
 - King didn't like his message, threw him into prison & then into a dry well (cistern) to die.
 - the King showed utter contempt by cutting his message (in a scroll) into pieces & burn them.
- According to tradition, Isaiah died a most horrible death
 - he was put inside a tree trunk & sawn into 2.

(vii) God asked them to do 'unimaginable' things.

- Hosea was asked to marry a prostitute
- Ezekiel was asked by God to
 - (1) lie on his side for 390 days, eat only 1/8 ounce of meat per day cooked over manure
 - (2) shave his head & beard
 - (3) show no sorrow when his wife died
- Q: Would you do something like this if God asked you?

(viii) How successful were the prophets?

- By our standards today, judging by success rate
 - almost all the prophets were failures.
- Jeremiah preached for 40 years, no one repented
- Likewise Hosea, preached for 40 years, no evidence of repentance.
- Isaiah (greatest of all prophets) preached 60 years
 - died most horrible death.
- Prophets were seldom honoured in their own country
 - nothing glamorous to be a true prophet

- Yet in God's eyes, the prophets were the true heroes of faith.
- God never promised the prophets that they will never be in trouble. God promised them to be with them in trouble.

"Do not be afraid of them. For I am with you to deliver you", declares the Lord
(Jer 1:8)

Thought

- Likewise, God never promised us that we'll never face problems in Life.
 - He promised to be with us when we face problems.

Look at the God behind the prophets

- When studying the books of minor prophets, don't be too fixated on the prophets
- More important to focus on the God behind the prophets

The 400 years Inter – Testament Period Of Silence

- Key question: What happened during these 400 years of silence?

1. Sources of Information

- How do we know what happened during this 400 years unrecorded in the Bible?
 - (i) Historical books of historian Josephus.
 - (ii) Apocrypha
 - (iii) Other Greek & Latin historians. (Polybius, Tacitus, Livy, Appian).

2. 400 years – 5 periods

(i) The Persian Period (536 – 333 BC)

- Persia ruled over Palestine
- End of Malachi (OT), Jews were under Persian rule

- more tolerant & kinder (than Assyrians)

(ii) The Greek Period (333 – 323BC)

- Alexander the Great spared Jerusalem
 - treated the Jews well

The Greek Period – Post Alexander the Great (323 – 204BC)

- After Alexander the Great died, his 4 generals carved out entire Greek Empire among themselves.
 - Ptolemy
 - Lysimachus
 - Cassander
 - Selenus
- Judea came under Antiochus Ptolemy's rule but eventually became part of Syria.
- Thus Judea became part of the Seleudae kingdom.

(iii) The Syrian Period (204 – 165BC)

- Antiochus the Great treated Jews harshly
 - so was his successor Seleucus Philopater.
- It was during this Syrian rule, Jews suffered most.

- Jerusalem was plundered, the walls torn down; the Temple was desecrated & furniture looted
 - after Temple was rebuilt by Zerubbabel & 50,000 Jews
 - after Nehemiah had rebuilt the Walls of Jerusalem
- Thousands were massacred.
 - children & women sold into slavery
- Jewish religion was banned
- All copies of the Law burned & owners executed.
- Many Jews decided to apostatize
 - i.e. renunciate their religion & even join in prosecution of fellow Jews.

- Back to dark days of the by Assyrians & Babylonian conquerors
 - but no prophets to warn them anymore.

(iv) The Maccabean Period (165 – 63BC)

- The Jews revolted against the Syrian rulers under their priest Matthias Maccabeus
 - with his son Judas Maccabeus leading the army
- This was known as the Maccabean Revolt
 - fought the Antiochus generals
- Before they were finally suppressed
 - they fought & defended valiantly

(v) The Roman Period (63BC onwards)

- The Greek Empire was over thrown by the Roman Empire under Julius Cesar
- Judea became part of the Roman Empire.
- Antipater was appointed the Procurator of Judea, he in turn appointed his son Herod to be governor of Galilee.
- This was the time when Jesus Chris grew up in Judea.

3. The Rise of Judaism – The Jewish Religious Leaders

- It was during the 400 years we see the rise of Judaism & the Pharisees & Sadducees and the institution of the Sanhedren (Council)
- In Old Testament – no mention of the Pharisees & Sadducees
 - likewise no ‘synagogues’ in OT but in NT.
- Teachings found in the Talmud consists of –
 - (i) Mishna (Oral Law or 2nd Law)
 - (ii) Gemara (Commentaries to Oral Law)
- These are traditions handed down orally which become part of the rules, precepts, interpretation & teachings of the Jews
 - in addition to the books in OT.

- It was these teachings & traditions our Lord Jesus Christ had to contend with against these Jewish scholars & traditionalist.
- It was during the 400 years of silence.
 - these Oral laws became hardened or became part of the Jewish Laws
 - traditions became part of the Law
 - institution of the Pharisees, Saducees & Sahendrin Council (supreme religious body that tried Jesus) became very powerful in Judean religious life.
- There were no prophets to check the growth & spread of some of these false teachings & beliefs which adulterated the OT teachings for 400 years.
- By the time our Lord Jesus came into the scene.
 - these traditional practices & beliefs of the Jews have hardened & institutionalized for nearly 400 years.
 - this was what our Lord has to contend with.
- When Jesus came into the scene, he posed a very serious threat to what these religious leaders stood for & had entrenched themselves in Jewish society
 - there was doctrinal conflict (Jesus exposed many of their wrong teachings)
 - there was conflict of powers (these religious leaders perceived that Jesus posed a direct challenge to their power, before Jesus came, their word was law).
- Hence, these religious leaders plotted to kill Jesus by getting the Romans to crucify him (they had no such power under Roman law)

Major Lessons From Minor Prophets

HOSEA

By: Tan Sin Liang

HOSEA

A Faithful God To An Unfaithful Nation

Setting:

- (i) When: 755 BC – 715 BC (40 years)
- (ii) Audience: Northern Kingdom (Israel).
- (iii) Contemporaries: Isaiah & Micah (Southern Kingdom: Judah), Amos (Israel)
 - Although Hosea is the 1st book in Minor Prophets.
 - he was not the 1st Minor Prophet chronologically.
 - Obadiah, Joel, Jonah & Amos were before him.

1. Spiritual Condition of Israel

- Outwardly Israel (Northern Kingdom, also called “Ephraim”) was prospering.
 - Inwardly, Israel was decaying inside, spiritually.
- The people had abandoned God & worshipped foreign idols.

Thought

- Likewise, some of us may appear to be doing well outwardly. But spiritually we may be struggling.
- Is God pleased with our lives?
- We may be far away from God. God doesn't matter anymore.
- You may still go to church but it's just a Sunday routine or social event.

- How did this come about?
- It began when 10 tribes of Israel under Jeroboam rebelled against Solomon's Kingdom after his death in 922 BC.
 - Israel was splitted into 2 Kingdoms.
- Jeroboam became King of Israel (Northern Kingdom).
- He was an ungodly King

- He employed his own priests, thus excluding the Levites from serving the Lord (because he saw them as threat, Levites loyal to Jerusalem, Judah)
 - so Levites left Israel & joined King Rehoboam in Judah (thus 3 tribes) (2 Chr. 11: 14-17)
- He & his false prophets brought in foreign gods/idols..
 - (i) worship of golden calf at Bethel & Dan
 - (ii) worship of Baal & Asherah
- These are chief Canaanite gods
 - represent power of fertility & sexual reproduction
 - their worship included rituals with sexual activities
 - male worshippers have sex with female priests or temple prostitutes
 - young women wanted to bear children, have sex with male priests.
- Out of 150 utterances by Hosea, ½ of them on idolatry

- “They are asking a piece of wood to tell them what to do! They think a stick (divining rod) can tell them the future. Longing after idols....they have played the prostitute, serving other gods and deserting their God.”
(Hosea 4: 11-12)
- “...you men are doing the same thing, sinning with whores and shrine prostitutes.”
(Hosea 4:14)
- “Hear this, you priests & all leaders of Israel...you have left me as a prostitute leaves her husband”
(Hosea 5: 1, 3)
- “O Samaria, I reject this calf – this idol you have made. This calf you worship was crafted by your own hands. It is not God. Therefore it must be smashed to bits.”
(Hosea 8: 5-6)
- “Israel has built many altars to take away sin but these very altars became places for sinning!”
(Hosea 8:11)
- “...the people of Ephraim sinned by worshipping Baal and thus sealed their destruction. Now they keep on sinning by making silver idols to worship.”
(Hosea 13: 1-2)

Thought:

- We may not commit idolatry as the Israelites did above
- But are there ‘idols’ in our lives we need to get rid off?
- “Idol” is anything that takes the place of God in your life.

2. Call of Hosea

- Against this backdrop of Israel's state of spiritual decay, God called Hosea to be his prophet.
 - to be God's spokesman to Israel (Northern Kingdom).
- God appointed Hosea to be His messenger to bring a specific message to Israel.
- To deliver this message effectively, God told Hosea to marry a prostitute. Why?

3. Hosea's Marriage to Gomer & Her Adulterous Life

- "When the Lord first began to speak to Israel through Hosea, He said to him, 'Go and marry a prostitute', so some of her children will be born to you from other men" (v.2)
- "This is to illustrate the way the people have become untrue to me, openly committing adultery against the Lord by worshipping other gods." (v.2)
- "So Hosea married Gomer" (v.3) (Hosea 1: 2-3)

- But who was Gomer?

Talk of the town – Hosea's marriage to Gomer

- Imagine you were living in the neighbourhood of Hosea
- You overheard this conversation between Hosea & one of his neighbours one day

Conversation between Hosea and his neighbour

- Neighbour: "Hey Hosea, is it true you're getting married?"
- Hosea: "Yes, I am".
- Neighbour: "So who is the lucky woman?"
- Hosea: "Gomer"
- Neighbour: "Gomer? Gomer who?"
- Hosea: "Gomer Diblaim"
- Neighbour: "Gomer Diblaim? Are you sure or not? Aiyoh, that woman, her reputation not very good. You know what I mean?"
- Hosea: "Yes, I know what you mean. That's why I'm marrying her."
- Neighbour: "What? Are you crazy? Why, of all women in this town, marry her?"
- Hosea: "Because God asked me to marry her".

- Neighbour: "What? God asked you to marry a prostitute? Are you sure or not? Alamak! How can God ask you do such a thing? How can God ask you, a holy man to marry a woman like Gomer (many people say she's a prostitute)? You'll be the laughing stock of the whole town. So are you going to marry her?"
- Hosea: "Yes, I am because God asked me to".

- So Hosea married Gomer who soon bore him his son, Jezreel.
 - he looked like his daddy, Hosea. So they were all happy.
- Soon Gomer become pregnant and bore Hosea a 2nd child
 - a girl (who bore no resemblance to Hosea).
 - because she was born from another man
- Hosea forgave Gomer, soon she was pregnant again with 3rd child, a boy. Hosea was quite happy but unsure.
 - again, this son didn't look like Hosea
 - he was born from yet another man.
- So here was Hosea & his family (family album)
 - Hosea, Gomer, 3 children, (1 looked like him, the other 2 no resemblance of him at all).
- So Hosea & family became the laughing stock in town.

4. Was God playing a cruel joke on Hosea? Why was God doing this?

- So here we are: Hosea preaching his heart out, street by street, pleading to the Israelites to stop committing spiritual adultery by forsaking God & going after other gods.
- But how could Hosea go round everywhere telling people not to prostitute themselves with other gods.
 - when his own wife is prostituting herself with other men!
- How could Hosea tell people to stop committing spiritual adultery when his own wife, Gomer, is committing adultery?
- What a contradiction! How could anyone take Hosea seriously?
 - "Hosea, put your own marriage in order before you start preaching about adultery" they said to him.

- So did God make a mistake by appointing Hosea to be his spokesman for such a message?

5. Hosea's life an object lesson to Israel

- Do you know that every time the people in Israel laughed at Hosea, they were laughing at themselves?
- Do you know that every time the people in Israel sneered at Hosea, they were sneering at themselves?
- Gomer, the unfaithful wife, represented unfaithful Israel.
 - whereas Hosea, the faithful husband represented Israel's faithful God.
- So Gomer represented Israel, whilst Hosea represented God
- So God was using Hosea's life to demonstrate as an object lesson how far Israel had sinned against God.
- While Gomer had committed adultery by abandoning her husband & sought after other men
 - likewise Israel had committed adultery by abandoning God and sought after foreign gods (because God was betrothed to Israel).
- Hence, while Gomer had committed physical adultery against her husband, Hosea
 - Israel had committed spiritual adultery against God.
- So who else is more qualified to preach to Israel about unfaithfulness?
 - Hosea has seen it in his own life
 - he understood the heart wrenching pain of seeing Gomer leaving him & go after various men in town & give birth to 'bastards' (illegitimate children).
- How much it must have hurt Hosea to live with this for 40 years.
- That's exactly how hurt God must have felt to see his children, Israel abandoning God & seek after foreign gods.
- So as Hosea preached & pleaded to Israelites not to forsake God & worship idols & to return to God
 - he pleaded with passion and in tears because no one else in Israel understood the pain of adultery than Hosea.

- So who else was better qualified to be God's spokesman to speak to an adulterous nation than Hosea?

6. **God instructed Hosea to redeem Gomer**

- Having giving birth to 3 children (1 legitimate, 2 illegitimate)
 - Gomer left Hosea & dumped all 3 children on him
- Gomer disappeared. In all likelihood, she ended up in the slave market (since no man wanted to marry her anymore).
- Against this tragic background, God did another incredible thing.
 - He asked Hosea to redeem his unfaithful wife.
- Q: What would you do if you were Hosea?
 - after years of pain & humiliation, she disappeared
 - now God says: go and find her & buy her back to live with you.

- "Then the Lord said to me, "Go and get your wife again. Bring her back to you and love her, even though she loves adultery. For the Lord still loves Israel even though people have turned to other gods....." (v.1)
- "So I bought her back for 15 pieces of silver and about 5 bushels of barley and a measure of vine" (v.2)
- "Then I said to her, "You must live in my house for many days and stop your prostitution. During this time, you will not have sexual intercourse with anyone , not even with me." (v.3) (Hosea 3: 1-3)

7. **God's Redeeming Love**

- So Hosea went to the slave market and bought her (thus giving her the freedom) to live with him
 - to love her despite her shameful past.
- Just as Hosea demonstrated what a faithful & forgiving husband he was to Gomer.
 - this was 2nd object lesson God want to demonstrate to the people of Israel,

: although they've sinned against God, God is still faithful, God still loves them & will forgive them if they will repent & return to the lord.

- This is a beautiful illustration of God's redeeming love for sinners
 - no matter how badly you've sinned against God, God wants to redeem you back if you repent & return to God.
- This is also a beautiful picture of the true nature of God
 - He's the Redeeming God.
 - He's the God who would not let go & seek after sinners.
 - He's the God who would go to any length to go after you to save you (by dying on the cross for all mankind).
 - He's the Good shepherd who will leave the 99 sheep to go after 1 sheep who is lost.
 - He's the Enduring God whose love endures even for sinners.
- That in short, summarises the character of God.
- If all you see is Hosea and his tragic relationship with Gomer.
 - you have missed the whole picture.
 - you must see, not just Hosea, but the God of Hosea.

8. 3 Fold Message of Hosea to Israel

1st: Israel had sinned against God

- God brought very specific charges against God
 - see details under "Spiritual Condition of Israel".
 - hence Israel cannot plea ignorance of its spiritual condition.

2nd: Judgment is certain & it's coming

(i) Israel will be conquered by Assyrians

- Hosea referred to the "destruction from Assyria" (*Hosea 9:5*)
- he also alluded to the fact Israel "will be forced to serve Assyria" (*Hosea 11:5*)

- All these were prior warnings that because of Israel's sins, Israel will be conquered by the Assyrians & forced to serve them
- This came true in 722 BC when Assyria conquered Israel (Northern Kingdom).
- Hosea saw the fulfillment of his own prophecy in his life time
 - he became a refugee, that's when he wrote this book "Hosea".

(ii) Other judgments

- Ecological disaster

- "That is why your land is not producing. It is filled with sadness, and all living things are becoming sick and dying. Even the animals, birds, and fish have begun to disappear."
(Hosea 4:3)

- So ecological disaster can be a sign of God's judgment.

Thought

- Ever wonder why your life is heading nowhere?
- May be a good time to examine our life, God may be saying something to us.

3rd Call to Repentance

- God never stopped at merely accusing to Israel's of her sins & told them the judgment to come.
- If God had stopped here, He is not a merciful God or a loving God.
- God never shuts the door. He always stretch out his arms of reconciliation. He asked Israel to repent of their sins & return to God.

- "Come, let us return to the Lord! He has torn us in pieces; now he will heal us. He has injured us; now he will bandage our wounds. In a short time, he will restore us so that we can live in his presence" (Hosea 6: 1-3)

- "Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God..." "Bring your petitions, and return to the Lord". (Hosea 14: 1-2)

- "Then I will heal you of your idolatry and faithlessness, and my love know no bounds, for my anger will be gone forever! I will be to Israel like refreshing dew from heaven." (Hosea 14: 4-5)

- Note the tenderness of God’s invitation to reconciliation
 - Even as God’s anger burn against Israel
 - God still speak with tenderness to Israel (to us also).

- “But then I will win her back once again, I will lead her out into the desert and speak tenderly to her there.” (Hosea 2:14)

Thought: God speaks to us during our “desert periods”

- Some of us may be going through the ‘desert’ period of our lives.
 - perhaps you’ve lost your job.
 - you’re struggling with your health or family or with your finances
 - or your marriage
- It’s during this ‘harsh & dry’ periods of our life God speaks to us
- Are you going through a ‘desert period’ spell of your life?
- My own ‘desert period’ experience since I agreed to teach these series.

- Another significant point to note is: Our God is a God who never let go. He’s not a God who gives up on you – even though you may have sinned.

- “Oh, how can I give you up. Israel! How can I let you go? How can I destroy you.....My heart is torn within me, and my compassion overflows.” (v.8)
- “No, I will not punish you as my burning anger tells me to. I will not completely destroy Israel, for I am God....I am the Holy One living among you, and I will not come to destroy.” (v.9) (Hosea 11: 8-9)

- Note God’s dilemma. He’s a Holy God, hence he has to punish sin. But he is also a loving & merciful God.
- Even in anger, God is merciful
- Therefore if Israel repent of her sin. God will redeem & restore Israel back to God.
- This is an open invitation given to us today.
- Like a loving father, God has to discipline his own children but nevertheless feel bad inside having to do so.

Conclusion

Lessons learned

- What lessons have you learned from the book of Hosea?
- How can you apply them to your life today?
- What did you learn about God?
- What did you learn about the prophet Hosea?

Major Lessons From Minor Prophets

JONAH

By: Tan Sin Liang

JONAH

A Rebellious Prophet & A Relenting God.

Setting:

- (i) When: Approx. 785 – 760 BC.
- (ii) Contemporaries: Preceded Amos & Hosea.
- (iii) Where: Nineveh (Assyria) (Iraq).

Historical Background of Nineveh & Assyria

(i) Nineveh

- Capital of Assyrian Empire, most powerful city in the world then
- 3 times described as a 'great city'.
- 120,000 people living in darkness.
- Also described as 'city of murder', a 'wicked city'.

(ii) Assyria

- It was the new super power arising in this part of the world.
 - Assyrian Empire.
- Enemy of Israel – Assyrians waiting to conquer Israel.
- Assyrians were well known throughout the region for their cruelty, savagery & barbarity (well documented in archaeological records).

Jonah

- Jonah was a prophet in Israel during King Jeroboam's (bad king) reign. (*2 Kings 14:25*).
- Not much else is known of Jonah (son of Amittai).

1st Commission: To Preach To Nineveh

- “The Lord gave this message to Jonah son of Amittai: “Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh! Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are” (v 1-2)
- “But Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction in order to get away from the Lord. He went down to seacoast, port of Joppa, where he found a ship leaving for Tarshish. He bought a ticket and went on board, hoping that by going away to the west he could escape from the Lord.” (v.3)

(Jonah 1: 1-3)

- God commissioned Jonah (a prophet) to go & preach to Nineveh (500 miles N. East).
 - he took a ship & went to the opposite direction to Tarshish (2,000 miles West).
- Unlike the other 16 prophets, Jonah was a rebellious prophet.
 - contrast this with Hosea (obedient in marrying a prostitute).
- Jonah was a missionary who didn't like his 'posting'
 - he may have said: “Anywhere but Nineveh. I hate Nineveh. I'm out of here. I'll have no part in this mission.”
 - so he ran away from God by taking a ship 2000 miles away.
- Guess who was there? God in the midst of his journey.
- You can try to run away from your calling but you can't run away from God.

Thought

- Are you running away from what God has called you to do?
- Have you been ignoring God's voice?
- Have you been postponing his call?

(1) Why did Jonah disobey God in Preaching to Nineveh?

- The text is silent. All it says God called Jonah to go to Nineveh, he went to Tarshish. Why?
- Before we 'condemn' Jonah for disobeying God or being selfish.

- we must understand the historical context during the time of Jonah.

3 reasons why Jonah refused to go to Nineveh

(i) Assyrians Enemy of Israel

- Israelites hated the Assyrians because they were the No. 1 Enemy of Israel.
- they were the Super Power massing around next door.
- Jonah, being a prophet, knew too well it was a matter of time the Assyrians will invade Israel.
- Like all Israelites, Jonah hated the Assyrians.
- To go to Nineveh to preach to Assyrians is like asking the Jews to invite Nazi Germans to a gospel rally.

(ii) Nineveh was a wicked city

- God himself described the people of Nineveh as “wicked”.
- Assyrians were a savage & barbaric race.
- To give some idea how wicked was the city of Nineveh, listen to what prophet Nahum described Nineveh (100 years after Jonah).

- Nineveh was described as a “city of murder and lies” (*Nah. 3:1*)
- her wealth is from the plunder of other nations (Assyrian economy) (*Nah 3:2*)
- idolatry, witchcraft & prostitution (*Nah 3:4*)

(iii) If he preached to Nineveh, God will save Nineveh

- The 1st 2 reasons above are Jonah’s own personal reasons.
- He like all Jews, hated the Assyrians.
- in his mind, they don’t deserve to be saved & should not be saved.

Thought

- When God called you to do something for Him, do you allow your personal prejudice to cloud your decision?
- What if God asked you to reach out to someone you don’t like?

- What Jonah wanted was for Nineveh to fall, not to be saved.
- If Nineveh is saved, then Israel, as a nation was at risk to be attacked by Assyrians!
- More importantly, Jonah knew God too well. He knew the heart of God.
 - he knew if he preached to Nineveh and the people repented, then God will relent & withhold judgment & Nineveh will be spared.
- This motive was clearly revealed in Chap. 4:2 after God spared Nineveh and Jonah was so upset.

- “So he complained to the Lord about it: Didn’t I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? That is why I ran away from Tarshish. I knew you were gracious and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. I knew how easily you would cancel your plans for destroying these people.” *(Jonah 4:2) (NLT)*

- “...for I know that you’re a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love & relenting from disaster”. *(Jonah 4:2) (ESV)*

- In another words, what Jonah wanted and what God wanted were not the same. (his personal agenda & God’s agenda not the same).
- Jonah wanted Nineveh destroyed
- God wanted to save Nineveh (no matter how wicked).
- Jonah didn’t like the mission God had given him.
 - so he went “AWOL” (absent without leave).
- Jonah, the messenger became too big for the message.
- Jonah, God’s prophet, had become bigger than God.

(2) Jonah ended up inside a whale’s belly

- So Jonah took a ship and headed for Tarshish (2,000 miles away).
 - hoping God will not find him there. How naïve.
- Jonah should have read King David’s Psalm 139.

- “I can never escape from your spirit!
I can never get away from your presence.”
- “If I go heaven, you are there;
If I go down to the place of the dead, you are there.”

(Psalm 139: 7-8)

- Note that when Jonah took the first step to run away from God, he went all the way “down”:

- “He went down to the seacoast, to the port of Joppa...” (v3)
- “And all this time Jonah was sound asleep down in the hold.” (v5).
- “So the captain went down after him.” (v6) (Jonah 1: 3,5-6)

Lesson

- When you disobey God’s instruction, you try to run away, your life may go all the way down.

Jonah & The Whale

- So Jonah took a ship & headed towards Tarshish.
- Guess who was there in the midst of his escape?
- God. He sent a storm threatening to capsize the ship.
 - while Jonah slept through the storm
- The sailors, being superstitious, suspected someone on the ship had brought bad luck.
 - so they decided to cast lots.
- Sure enough, Jonah lost the toss.
- He owned up, he was the ‘jinx’, he confessed he was running away from God.
- He figured that he must be the reason for this life-threatening storm.
- So he asked the sailors to throw him into the sea.
 - to sacrifice himself for the rest of the people on the ship.
- God then send a great fish (most likely a whale) to swallow him up.
 - he was inside the whale’s stomach for 3 days & 3 nights.

- Inside the whale's stomach Jonah prayed (not a prayer for deliverance but a prayer of praise & thanks giving) for saving him.
- God then ordered the whale to spit Jonah out onto the beach.

(3) Is the story of Jonah & the whale fiction?

- Can this be a true story? Or are we to treat this miraculous episode to be a mere fiction?
- 2 reasons why it's not fiction.

(i) Actual account of person found in whale's belly.

- Sidlow Baxter "Explore The Book", pg. 153.
 - related incident by Sir Francis Fox, which was investigated by 2 scientists (one, de Parville, scientific editor of 'Journal Des Debats' of Paris).

- In Feb. 1891, whale-ship 'Star of the East' was hunting whales in the Falkland Islands.
- They sighted a large sperm whale, so they lowered 2 small boats to harpoon the whale.
- The splash of the whale's tail was so violent.
 - It threw 2 men into the waters.
- One was drowned, the other sailor could not be found.
- The sperm whale was killed & the carcass was lying by the ship's side.
 - they spent the rest of the day removing the whale's blubber.
- The next day they hauled the carcass onto the ship & they started to work on the stomach of the whale.
- When they cut open the stomach, they found all sorts of spasmodic signs of life.
- What else did they find? The body of the missing harpooner!
- They were not sure he was dead or alive because he was unconscious.
- They washed him on the deck with water. He was revived! But he was incoherent.
- The captain took care of him. On 3rd week, he had fully recovered & resumed his normal duty!
- When they pulled this sailor out of the whale's stomach.
 - they could not recognise him.
- His skin was completely bleached by the gastric acid in the whale's stomach.

- Since this incident happened in the 19th century (1891) it is hard to verify the authenticity of this story.
- But this story may well be true!

(ii) 2nd reason: Episode of Jonah referred to by Jesus in Matthew 12: 39-40

- Jesus regarded Jonah as a historical person with direct reference to the 'whale' incident.
- Jesus referred to Jonah's episode when the Pharisee's asked Jesus for a miraculous sign to prove that he was indeed the Son of God.

■ "But Jesus replied, 'Only an evil, faithless generation would ask for a miraculous sign, but the only sign I will give to them is the sign of the prophet Jonah.'

■ "For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish" for 3 days and 3 nights, so I, the Son of Man, will be in the heart of the earth for 3 days and 3 nights."

(Matthew (2:39,40))

- Q: Would Jesus refer to a fictitious person or a fictitious incident in responding to an important question raised by the Pharisees (who themselves were familiar with the episode of Jonah)?
- My view: Jonah & the whale is not a fiction.

2nd Commission

- After the 1st commission was aborted, the Lord re-commissioned Jonah, the 2nd time.
- God could have abandoned Jonah & choose another prophet instead. Why didn't he?

Lesson

- Our God is a God of 2nd chance. Even though we may have failed him, yet he gives us another chance to serve him. So don't give up.
- Canadian & Australian rejection of Adrian's visa to study there.

- “Then the Lord spoke to Jonah a second time: “Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh, and deliver the message of judgment I have given you.” (v1-2)
- “This time Jonah obeyed the Lord’s command and went to Nineveh, a city so large that it took 3 days to see it all.” (v3)
- “On the day Jonah entered the city, he shouted to the crowds: “40 days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!” (v4)
- “The people of Nineveh believed God’s message, and the greatest to the least, they decided to go without food and wear sackcloth to show the sorrow.(v5)
- “When the King of Nineveh heard what Jonah was saying, he stepped down from his throne and took off his robes. He dressed himself in sackcloth and sat on a heap of ashes. (v6).
- “Then the King and his nobles sent this decree throughout the city: ‘No one, not even the animals, may eat or drink anything at all.’ (v7)
- “Everyone is required to wear sackcloth and pray earnestly to God. Everyone must turn from their evil ways and stop all their violence.” (v8)
- “Who can tell? Perhaps even yet God will have pity on us and hold back his fierce anger from destroying us.” (v9)
- “When God saw that they had put a stop to their evil ways, he had mercy on them and didn’t carry out the destruction he had threatened.” (v10).
(Jonah 3: 1-10)

1. Jonah preached, Nineveh repented & God relented.

- So Jonah preached that Nineveh’s would be destroyed in 40 days’ time.
 - he must have been happy to deliver this message, hoping they would not respond.
- However, the King & the people repented.
- And God relented. He withheld his judgment.
- So Nineveh was spared.

2. Jonah's response to God's mercy

(i) What was Jonah's response?

- "This change of plans upset Jonah, and he became angry".
(Jonah 4:1)

(ii) Why was Jonah angry with God?

- He was angry because he knew all along that God is a merciful & relenting God
- God will relent if Nineveh repented.

- This change of plan upset Jonah & he became angry. (v1)
- "He complained to the God, I knew that you were a gracious and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. I knew how easily you could cancel your plans for destroying these people." (v2) (Jonah 4: 1-2)

- Jonah didn't like the 'merciful' character of God.
 - God is too kind. He will forgive Israel's enemy too easily & let them get away scot free.
- Jonah didn't like the outcome that may come about.
 - he didn't want Nineveh saved, he wanted to see Nineveh destroyed.
- This is where the 'prophet' has become bigger than God.
- He allowed his personal prejudice & feeling's interfere with God's calling.
- So God asked Jonah whether it was right for him to be angry with God?
- Answer: silent (probably sulked).
- He went out to the edge of city of Nineveh to build a shelter. Why?
 - he wanted to see whether to see Nineveh would be destroyed!
 - he was still harboring the hope that Nineveh would be destroyed.

God's intervention

- Even in his anger & bitterness, God still sought to comfort him.
- God caused a leafy plant (a gourd plant) grow over the shelter overnight.
 - to give Jonah comfort from the sun.
- But God did a strange thing. He also caused a worm to eat the plant until it died.
- Now Jonah got angry that the plant died.
 - he's angry with everything!
 - Jonah's answer: "Yes, even angry enough to die."
 - now Jonah wants to die!
- God chided Jonah for his misplaced concern & priority as a prophet.

- "You feel sorry for the plant, though you did nothing to put it there. And a plant is only, at best, short lived." (v10).
 - but in Nineveh is more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness.....shouldn't I feel sorry for such a great city?" (11)
(Jonah 4: 10-11)

Thought

- What about us? Are we more concerned about our lives than people (friends, relatives) who may be perishing because they have no salvation.
- When was the last time you shared the gospel of salvation with a non-Christian?

3. Lessons in Jonah

(i) God is not the God of the Jews alone but the universe.

- Last conversation between God & Jonah in chap. 4 sums up the crux of the whole book of Jonah.
- The withering plant & Jonah's response to it.
 - that's not the important thing.

- The issue: When you look at the lost people, unbelievers (Nineveh).
 - what do you see?
- When God looked at Nineveh.
 - he saw 120,000 souls living in darkness who need to be saved.
- When Jonah looked at Nineveh.
 - he saw a wicked city.
 - he saw an enemy city.
 - he saw a gentile city, a heathen city.
- It must be destroyed.
- Our perspective & God's perspective of salvation may be different.
- God is not only a God for the Jews only; he's also the God of the gentiles.
 - he is the God of John 3:16 ("For God so loved the world...").
- God is not only a God to good people, he's also God to the 'bad' people (prisoners, murders, robbers, drug addicts, cheats, prostitutes etc.).
- Jonah's God (our God) is the God to all mankind those who are lost.

(ii) God is a merciful & relenting God

(a) What Jonah got wrong

- Nineveh should not be saved because it was –
 - a wicked city
 - a heathen city
 - enemy of Israel
- Jonah was prejudiced as to who should be saved.
 - he would have no qualms if Nineveh was a Jewish city.

Thought

- Are you prejudiced who should be saved & who should not be saved?
- What if God were to save people according to His mere liking /dislike of a person?
 - bad people (murdered, thief, robbers) will never be saved.

(b) What Jonah got right

- Jonah was absolutely right is in 'characterising' God.

- “....I know that you were a gracious and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. I know how easily you could cancel your plans for destroying these people.”
(NLT Jonah 4:2-3)

- “....for I know that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.”
(ESV Jonah 4:23)

- Jonah was right that he understood that the character of God –
 - God is a gracious (merciful) God;
 - God is a compassionate God;
 - God is slow to anger
 - God abounds in (full of) steadfast love (unfailing love)
 - God is a relenting God (change in plan) if people repent.

4. Ending of book of Jonah

- Why did it end so abruptly?
- What happen to Jonah?
- Did he repent?
- What is the book of Jonah about?
- Clue: Is it about Jonah? Or God?
- What is the most important verse in the whole book?

- Book of Jonah is about God
- If you all have focused on is Jonah
 - you missed the point.

Why the book of Jonah end so abruptly?

- God has said the most important thing in the book, the rest is secondary (not important).
- What is the most important verse in the whole book?

“...Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in darkness.....Shouldn't I feel sorry for such a great city?”
(NLT Jonah 4:11)

“...should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left.....?”
(ESV Jonah 4:11)

- This last verse in the book summarises the entire book of Jonah
 - that God feels sorry for people living in darkness
- So should we

Thought

- Do you know anyone living in darkness?
- What are you going to do?
- No matter how bad a person may be, God is interested in him.

Lessons learned

- What practical lessons have you learned for your daily life?
- What have you learned about God?
- What have you learned about the prophet, Jonah?

Major Lessons From Minor Prophets

NAHUM

By: Tan Sin Liang

NAHUM

Nineveh Revisited – A City That Ran Out of God’s Mercy.

Setting:

- (i) When written: (approx. 660 BC)
 - About 50 years before fall of Nineveh (612 BC)
- (ii) Contemporaries: Jeremiah
- (iii) Audience: Nineveh & Judah
 - Nahum was not sent to Nineveh. Message delivered in Judah.

1. Book of Nahum – sequel to book of Jonah

- Nahum is the ‘sequel’ to Jonah
- Book of Jonah only tells you ½ story of Nineveh.
- Book of Nahum tells you the remaining ½ of story of Nineveh.
- Hence, must read the books of Jonah & Nahum together.

2. Historical Perspective of God’s dealing with Nineveh

- 100 years ago (before God called Nahum), Jonah was sent to Nineveh to proclaim judgment on Nineveh because of its sins
- Jonah proclaimed judgment to Nineveh
 - the Ninevites (from King to its people) repented
 - God withheld judgment against Nineveh
 - So God spared Nineveh because it repented.
- 100 years after their repentance, Assyria had become more powerful to become the world’s super power (Assyrian Empire).
- Nineveh became the mightiest city in the world.
- So Nineveh became powerful, proud and arrogant, ‘invincible city’ because of its military might.

- The Assyrians (represented by Nineveh) were oppressing Judah (God's people).

Sins of Nineveh

- (i) 'City of murder & lies' (cruelty & barbarity) (*Nah 3:1*);
 - "beautiful & faithless city, mistress of deadly charms, enticing nations with her beauty" (*Neh 3:4*)
- (ii) 'Worship of fake gods' (*Nah 3:4*), 'idols in your temple of your gods' (*Nah 2:14*); i.e. idolatry;
- (iii) 'King who dared to plot evil against God' (*Nah 3:11*);
 - King Sennacherib (705 – 681 BC) openly defied God (*2 Kings 18:13-35*)
- (iv) Social injustice – exploitative merchants (*Nah 3:16*);
- (v) Cruelty (*Nah 3:19*)

- Since God spared Nineveh 100 years ago
 - Nineveh reverted to original sins,
- God was going to judge and punish Nineveh.
- So God called his prophet Nahum to pronounce judgment on Nineveh.
 - 100 years after his prophet, Jonah pronounced 1st judgment.
- This time, there was only 1 message for Nineveh
 - judgment is coming, there'll be no message for repentance.
- The days of repentance are over, 100 years long enough.
- God had forgiven Nineveh, now judgment time
- God will not allow His enemies to oppress His people unchecked forever.

Lesson

- God will deal with His enemies who keep on oppressing His people around the world eventually (esp. Israel).

Bad news for Nineveh, good news for Judah

- What was bad news for Nineveh, it was good news for Judah.
- That was what Jonah (100 years ago) had hoped for

- destruction of Nineveh can only be good news for Judah.
- Bear in mind, 100 years now on, as Nahum stepped into the scene
 - Israel (Northern Kingdom) was gone.
 - conquered by Assyria in 722 BC
 - Judah (Southern Kingdom), in order to avoid been invaded by Assyria, had to pay large tributes to Assyria to avoid invasion
- How long can Judah do that? Matter of time Assyrians will conquer Judah as well.
- But God had other plans for Assyrians & Nineveh

3. Judgment pronounced against Nineveh

- In the last 2 chapters (Chaps 2 & 3), Nahum described the judgment in very vivid detail (like a documentary).
 - before the fall of Nineveh.
- The judgment was to come in the form of an invasion by an unnamed super power
 - a new super-power that will arise later.
- History confirms this super-power was the Babylonian Empire.
- In 612 BC, Nineveh was conquered by the Babylonians.
 - as predicted by Nahum (50 years ago).
- 50 years after judgment was pronounced against Nineveh, judgment was delivered
- As prophesied by Nahum in *Chap. 1:12* (“...they (Assyrians) will be destroyed and disappear”)
 - Nineveh was so completely destroyed (612 BC)
 - it was not discovered until 1845 (1,200 years later)
- So would Judah be saved at last?
 - no. The Babylonian conquerors would replace the Assyrian conquerors.
- Soon after the Babylonians captured & destroyed Nineveh, they started to invade Judah.

- After 3 invasions, Babylonians soon conquered Judah
- started to exile the Jews to Babylon in 3 Exiles (“Babylonian Exile”).
- 1st exile (Daniel) was 609 BC (3 years after fall of Nineveh).

4. What lessons can we learn from Book of Nahum?

(i) Sovereignty of God

- Nineveh was a heathen city, what has that to do with God?
- God is the God of the whole universe
- he rules over nations who do not acknowledge him.
- “Christian” & “Non-Christian” cities and nations are accountable to God.
- If God can bring judgment on Nineveh (a heathen city),
- God can bring judgment to any wicked city & society.
- Nineveh stands as an example to all nations around the world

Thought

- God is a sovereign God. He rules over Christians & non-believers.
- No one is beyond God’s sovereignty.

(ii) God is also a jealous, avenging & wrathful God

- The Ninevites, having seen God relented from destroying their city,
- took God’s mercy for granted.
- They reverted to their sinful & wicked ways.
- They thought they can continue to take advantage of God’s mercy.
- However, they forgot that God is also a holy God
- He cannot tolerate sin & wickedness.
- He will eventually have to re-visit and deal with Nineveh’s once again

- And when God had to re-visit Nineveh 2nd time
 - it would not be the same (as in Jonah's time).
- This time, God had only 1 message for Nineveh:
 - judgment. It's certain & it's coming
- Nineveh will be destroyed
- Nineveh had become a city that ran out of God's mercy.
- They would soon discover, what Nahum described in the beginning of the Book of Nahum.
 - the other true side / character of God.
- Here is Nahum's characterisation of God. (*Nah 1:2-3*)

- “The Lord is a jealous God, filled with vengeance and wrath. He takes revenge in all who oppose him and furiously destroy his enemies!”
- “The Lord is slow to get angry, but his power is great, and he never lets the guilty go unpunished.”
(*NLT, Nah 1:2-3*)

- “The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies.”
- “The Lord is slow to anger and great in power and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty.”
(*ESV, Nah 1:2-3*)

- This is the ‘fearsome’ side of God
- Contrast this with character of God we’ve learned from Hosea & Jonah
 - Hosea: the enduring, faith & restoring God.
 - Jonah: the relenting God.
 - Nahum: the fearsome, avenging & wrathful God

- Lesson
- We need to have a healthy fear for God. We need to revere God.
 - Often we take God too casually.

- However, Nahum is quick to paint a balance picture of God in verses 7 & 8 (Chap 1).

- “The Lord is good. When trouble comes, he is a strong refuge. And he knows everyone who trusts him.” (v7).
- “But he sweeps away his enemies in an overwhelming flood. He pursues his foes into the darkness of the night.” (v8) *(NLT, Nah 1:7-8)*

- That’s comforting thought. For those of us who believe & trust in the Lord.

- He is a good God.
- He is a strong refuge (in times of trouble).
- He knows everyone who trust him. (personal God)

- For those who do not know/trust him

- God is a fearsome God.
- He is an avenging God.
- He is a wrathful God.
- He never lets the guilty get away.
- Nineveh learned all the above.

Thought

- So who is God to you?

Lessons Learnt

- What lessons did you learn that would be applicable to your daily life?
- What did you learn about God?

Major Lessons From Minor Prophets

HABAKKUK

By: Tan Sin Liang

HABAKKUK

The Prophet Who Dared To Ask God The Hard Questions

Setting:

- When written: Approx. 607 BC.
 - about few years before fall of Judah to Babylonians (605 BC).
- Audience: Judah (no more Israel).
- Contemporary: Jeremiah

Arrangement of books of Habakkuk & Zephaniah

- Although the Bible arrange Habakkuk's book before Zephaniah's book.
 - Zephaniah's period of ministry (640 BC – 621 BC) was before Habakkuk's ministry (607 BC – 588 BC)
 - so chronologically, Zephaniah should come before Habakkuk
- For our study, we shall follow the chronological order (i.e. Zephaniah before Habakkuk).

Historical Setting

- Dark clouds are gathering over Judah
 - soon it will descend upon Judah
 - like a terrible storm Judah had never seen before.
- Like its Northern Kingdom (Israel), Judah will be invaded by another wicked super power which will destroy Judah & Jerusalem (Babylonians).
- It was during this dark period, prophet Habakkuk was called to warn Judah that
 - If they do not repent of their sins, they will face a similar fate their Northern cousins (Israel) had faced.
- In 722 BC, God used the Assyrians to punish Israel

- invaded and exiled to Assyria

Zephaniah earlier prophecy

- Zephaniah had earlier delivered a very clear message in graphic detail how Judah will be invaded by the Babylonians.
 - the day of judgment was fast approaching.
- He urged the Jews in Judah
 - to stop worshipping Baal & Molech (foreign idols)
- He warned the leaders: kings, judges, priests (who defiled the Temple) & false prophets.
 - that they will face judgment.
- However, Zephaniah also deliver a call to repentance
 - to provide them an exit – a way of escape
 - if they repent, God may relent & withhold judgment (as happened in Nineveh).

- After Zephaniah's ministry ended in 612 BC
 - at this 11th hour, prophet Habakkuk came into the picture.
- By now
 - Israel (Northern Kingdom) is gone (invaded by Assyrians in 722 BC)
 - Nineveh (Capital of Assyria) is gone (fell to Babylonians in 612 BC).
- The Babylonians, having invaded the Assyrian Empire & captured Nineveh
 - they're now (under King Nebuchadnezzar) waiting to invade Judah.
- It's against the backdrop of this imminent Babylonian invasion & death throes of Judah
 - this 11th hour prophet Habakkuk wrote this book.
- God had used the Assyrians to punish Israel
 - now God was going to use the Babylonians to punish Judah.
- A few years later, Habakkuk saw the fulfillment of his prophecy during his life time (605 BC).

2. Uniqueness of Book of Habakkuk

- In all the other cases in dealing with prophets
 - God always approached / called the prophet to deliver his message.
- In the case of Habakkuk, it was Habakkuk who approached God.
- Why? Because he was very troubled by what he saw was happening in Judah.
- Habakkuk decided to bring some of his tough & perplexing questions before God for an answer
 - when God gave him the 1st answer, he had an even tougher question to ask God.
- Hence, we have 1st Dialogue and 2nd Dialogue. (2 Chapters).
- Whilst he started the book with full of questions, he ended up a song of praise (one of the most beautiful psalms in the Bible). (3rd Chapter). Why?

Comparison between Jonah & Habakkuk

<u>Jonah</u>	<u>Habakkuk</u>
■ God called on Jonah	■ Habakkuk called on God
■ Jonah ran away from God	■ Habakkuk ran to God
■ Ends in foolishness	■ Ends in faith
■ Ended in a fish	■ Ends on watchtower - for God's answer

3. 1st Dialogue

- As Habakkuk looked around in Judean society at that time; he saw
 - violence, injustice and corruption
- He asked God

- “God, how long are you going to allow the wicked go unpunished?”
- “God, why aren’t you doing anything about it?”
- God’s reply:
 - “Don’t worry. These people will not go unpunished”
 - “What I’m going to do, even you won’t believe”.

- “Watch and be astounded at what I will do! For I am doing something....you wouldn’t believe....” (v5)
- “I am raising up the Babylonians to be the new power on the world scene. They are cruel and violent nation who will march across the world and conquer it.” (v6)
- “They are notorious for their cruelty. They do as they like and no one can stop them.” (v7) (Hab. 1: 5-7)

- God was going to use the cruel & wicked Babylonians to punish Judah for her sins.

4. 2nd Dialogue

(i) How can God allow a wicked nation to fulfill His divine plan?

- Habakkuk was appalled by God’s answer!
- He now knows that God was going to allow a new wicked super power to punish Judah. Now he is more troubled by God’s answer.
- How can a righteous God used a wicked nation to fulfill his own divine plan?
- This started the 2nd Dialogue.
- This is how Habakkuk put it to God

- “O Lord my God, my Holy One, you who are eternal – is your plan in all this to wipe us out? O Lord, our Rock, you have decreed the rise of these Babylonians to punish us and correct us for our terrible sins. (v12)”
- “You are perfectly just in this. But will you, who cannot allow sin in any form, stand idly by while they swallow us up? Should you be silent while the wicked destroy people who are more righteous than they? (v13)
- “Will you let them get away with this forever? Will they succeed in their heartless conquests?” (v17) (Hab1:12,13,17)

- Habakkuk acknowledged that God (as the Holy God who cannot allow sin) was right in punishing Judah for their unrepented sin.
- but is it right for God to stand by idly & watch his own people all killed (including the faithfuls who are righteous)?
- In another words, while acknowledging He is a Holy God (He must punish sin), he reminded God that He is also a Merciful God.

Thought

- During 2nd World War, people in Great Britain, France & Russia were asking:
 - “How can God use wicked country like German Nazis to invade & destroy our countries?”
- Jews must have asked the same question:
 - how can God allowed the German Nazis to kill 6 million Jews & God don't seem to be doing anything?
 - Where is God? The whole Jewish race (God's chosen race) was about to be exterminated.
 - this question must have been asked more than 6 million times, even today.
 - now you know why it's so hard to convert the Jews.
- The Americans must have asked the same question:
 - how can God allow the barbaric Japanese to invade Pearl Harbour?
- These are tough questions – no easy answers
- For the record:
 - Nazi Germany was completely destroyed by Allied nations.
 - Japan suffered 2 atomic bombs killing millions. (only nation in history).
 - The Holocaust (6 million Jews killed by Nazis) precipitated the founding of Israel in 1948 (Jews had no homeland since AD 70). No Holocaust, no Israel today.

(ii) Habakkuk's stance after he questioned God.

- Having asked God the tough questions, this is how he responded.

- “I will climb up into my watchtower now and wait to see what the Lord will say to me and how he will answer my complaint.”

(Hab. 2:1)

- Means: he said he will wait and see how God was going to answer him this time.
- Means: he would withhold his judgment. He would not pre-judge God.

Lesson

- We look around & see non-Christians & nominal Christians (don't go to church) 'doing better' than us, we ask God: "How come? Why?"
- When we face difficult situations (concerning our job, family, health, finances)
 - we tend to ask "WHY is this happening to me? Why? Why?"
- Nothing wrong in asking God "why". But don't pre-judge God.
 - means don't jump to your own conclusion about God.
- When we pre-judge God, we're always wrong. So withhold your judgment of God
- Learn to wait patiently for God's answer.

(iii) God's answer to Habakkuk's question

- What did God do?
- God gave Habakkuk 1 whole chapter (Chapter 2) of answers. (reminiscent of God's answer to Job)
- Here're highlight of God's reply to Habakkuk. (Chap.2)

(a) God's timing

- "But these things I plan won't happen right away. Slowly, steadily, the time approaches when the vision shall be fulfilled. If it seems slow, wait patiently, for it will surely take place. It will not be delayed." (*Hab. 2:3*)

- God's answer to Habakkuk: Be patient. Judgment will come, not straight away. It may be slow but it will surely come.
 - in God's time
- God's judgment may not come about immediately
 - but it will come (according to God's divine timing).
- God is never too early or too late
 - He is always on time (his time).

- So learn to wait patiently.

Thought

- Are you going through a 'waiting – room' experience?
- Waiting – one of the hardest things in life.
- In life, we go through all sorts of 'waiting-room ' experiences,
 - waiting to find a job, career
 - waiting for resolution to your marital problem
 - waiting for your 'difficult' son/daughter to be reconciled to you / your family
 - waiting for health problem to be remedied
- Be patient. Wait upon the Lord. God is never too late. He is always on time. As we wait. God wants to help to strengthen our faith, mould our character.

(b) The righteous shall live by faith

- “Look at the proud! They trust in themselves.....but the righteous shall live by faith”
(Hab 2:4)

- This immortal statement (“The righteous shall live by faith”) is quoted by Paul 3 times in the Bible.
 - this statement guided, inspired and influenced Paul’s writing and philosophy. Paul was quoting Habakkuk 2:4.

- “For in it (i.e. gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from start to finish, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith”. (Rom 1:17, ESV)

- “Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law for “The righteous shall live by faith.”
(Gal. 3:1, ESV)

- “For,
Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith.....” (*Heb. 10:38,ESV)

Hebrews 11: whole chap. on 'faith'

- This same statement by Habakkuk also changed the course of protestant history
 - by influencing the lives of Martin Luther (Father of Protestants) and Charles Wesley (founder of Methodist denomination).
- So what does “the righteous shall live by faith” mean?
- In the context of God’s answer in 2nd Dialogue in answer to Habakkuk’s question.
 - ‘righteous’ refers to those who believe in God, who put their trust in God
 - means: those who put their trust in God will live by faith in God.
 - means: If you believe in God, just trust Him. God knows what He is doing.

Thought

- Are you living your life by faith? What does that mean in your life?
- There’re many things in our lives we don’t understand. We can’t solve them. Are you struggling with such a situation right now?
- But God says: “Don’t worry. You can trust me. I will reveal to you one day. Meanwhile, just continue to trust me even if you don’t understand. In due time, you’ll understand.”
- My own experience: Why has God shut all the doors to Adrian’s study for the time being?

(c) God explained to Habakkuk how he was going to deal with

- greedy people, the oppressors, extortionists, murderers, those who enriched themselves unjustly, corrupt people and idolaters.
- living in Judah

(d) How God is going to punish Babylonians

- “You thieves! At last justice has caught up with you! Now you will get what your deserve for your oppression and extortion” (v8)
- “You have plundered many nations, now they will plunder you. You murderers! You have filled the countryside with violence and all the cities, too.” (v8)
- “How terrible it will be for you who get rich by unjust means...” (v9)
- “How terrible it will be for you who build cities with money gained by murder and corruption.” (v12)
- “Has not the Lord promised that the wealth of nations will turn to ashes?” (v13)

- The above pronouncements were referring to the Babylonians
 - their wickedness and how God was going to punish them
 - their national wealth accumulated by plundering the nations they invaded.
 - their ill-gotten wealth will disappear (this was fulfilled when the Persians, conquered the Babylonians in 539 BC).
- So God revealed how he was going to punish the Babylonians
 - after God used them to punish Judah.
- So Habakkuk need not worry that the Babylonians themselves were not getting away unpunished.
 - God will deal with the Babylonians later.

5. Habakkuk's Song of Praise.

- Having heard and been fully satisfied with God's explanation to his question
 - Habakkuk replied to God in psalm.
 - this is one of the most beautiful psalms in the Bible.
- With his new understanding of God and his divine power & plan
 - Habakkuk rejoiced in who God is and what he was going to do.

(i) Filled with awe by the amazing things God is going to do.

- "I have heard all about you, Lord, and I am filled with awe by the amazing things you have done." *(Hab. 3:1)*

- Having better understood God and His plan (in raising super power like Babylonians to be God's lightning rod and later destroy them for their wickedness)
 - Habakkuk is struck with awe.
- First, he was appalled by God's answer. Now he is struck with awe. Why?
- He is filled with awe because of amazing things God can do
- Habakkuk was struck by the awesomeness of God

- that He can raise a nation to become a world super power to fulfill God's plan
- He can also destroy this super power for their wickedness & excesses against God's people.

Thought

- We too need to be struck with awe by the amazing things God may be doing in our lives.
- What amazing things God has done in your life?
- My own testimony.

(ii) In your anger, remember your mercy

- Knowing that Judah will be destroyed by the wicked, powerful Babylonians, Habakkuk was also quick to remind God that in his anger, to remember his mercy.

- “Show us your power to save us. And **in your anger, remember your mercy.**”
(Hab. 3:2)

- Here's how Habakkuk described the fearsome side of God

- “When He looks, the nations tremble” (Hab 3:6)
- “You marched across the land in awesome anger and trample the nations in your fury” (Hab 3:12)
- “You went out to rescue your chosen people, to save the anointed ones” (Hab 3:13)

- What a beautiful & powerful prayer
- He reminded God while He is a Holy God (he's just in punishing sin).
 - but He is also a Merciful God. God must temper His anger with mercy (esp. those remnant faithfuls who are righteous).
- How can God not be moved by such a prayer?

(iii) Declaration of faith in disaster

- Despite the impending disaster that was going to descend upon Judah and starvation awaits, Habakkuk's ended his song with classic declaration of his faith in God.

- 1st: he questioned God
- Then, he was appalled by God
- Next, he was amazed by God
- Now, he sings to God
- What a wonderful progression of faith.

- “Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the olive crop fails, and the field is empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty.” (v17)
- “Yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation”.(v18)
- “The Sovereign Lord is my strength!” (v19) (Hab.3:17-19)

- Habakkuk knew fully well he and his fellow Jews in Judah will be facing extreme hardship and starvation (as a result of the Babylonians invading Judah).
- Yet he could declare his trust in God
 - even to the extent of being joyful (in the Lord)!
- How can he do it? Because God is now his newfound strength

- Thought
- In going through hard times, we must, like Habakkuk, learn to declare our trust in God.
 - It's a very powerful thing to be able to declare your faith in God while you're going through hard times.
 - That's what makes the Psalms great.
 - How can we do it? In God's strength.

- 2 Chronicles 16:9
- “The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him”

Lesson Learned

- What lesson did you learn that is applicable to your daily life?
- What did you learn about God?
- What did you learn about prophet, Habakkuk?

Major Lessons From Minor Prophets

**Introduction to
Post – Exilic Prophets**

By: Tan Sin Liang

The 3 Returns

1. Invasion of Babylonians & 3 Exiles

- In Habakkuk we saw how the Lord told him that He was raising the Babylonians to be new super power to punish Judah.
- The Babylonians invaded the Assyrian Empire & completely destroyed its capital city, Nineveh, in 612 BC (as prophet Nahum prophesied 50 years earlier).
- After that, the Babylonians began to invade Judah.
- After 3 invasions, Judah was completely destroyed & the Jews were exiled to Babylon in 3 separate exiles.
 - 1st Exile: 605 BC (Daniel was among them)
 - 2nd Exile: 597 BC
 - 3rd Exile: 586 BC (Jerusalem & Temple destroyed).
- Thus began the 'Post – Exilic' period.
- Thus what God told Habakkuk had come true.
- But God also told Habakkuk that after the Babylonians had punished Judah, God will punish the Babylonians. Why?

2. Why God Punished Babylonians

- “So the Lord brought the King of Babylon against them (Judah). The Babylonians killed Judah’s young men....They had no pity on killing people, killing both young and old, men & women, healthy or sick. God handed them all over to Nebuchadnezzar”. (v17)
- “The King also took home to Babylon all the utensils...used in the Temple of God, and the treasures from both the Lord’s Temple and the royal palace. He also took with him all the royal princes”. (v18)
- “Then his army set fire to the Temple of God, broke down the walls of Jerusalem burned all the palaces and completely destroyed everything of value”. (v19)
- “The few who survived were taken away to Babylon, and they became servants to the King and his sons...” (v20)
- “So the message of the Lord spoken through Jeremiah was fulfilled. The land finally enjoyed its Sabbath rest, lying desolate for 70 years, just as the prophet had said.” (v21)

(2 Chron. 36:17-21)

- killing young & old, men & women, healthy or sick.
- Looted the Temple of God of all the worship utensils & treasures
- Destroyed Temple of God by setting it on fire
- Walls of City of Jerusalem torn down
- Survivors exiled to Babylon to serve as servants / slaves
- These were the “excesses” committed by the Babylonians
 - God would punish them
- With the fall of Judah & destruction of Jerusalem & God’s Temple in 586BC
 - the whole Kingdom of Israel (once under King David & King Solomon) was wiped out from the face of the earth.
- The destruction was now complete.
- For 1st time, the Jews lost their homeland.

The Promise of Return to Jerusalem

- When all hope was gone, God spoke, thru his prophets (Jeremiah & Isaiah)
 - after 70 years. God will bring them home again.
- How was that possible? God raised another super power, Persian Empire, to punish & destroy the Babylonians
- God used the Persian King (Cyrus) to issue a decree to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple & later Jerusalem.
- Thus began the “3 Returns”
 - “3 Exiles”, “3 Returns”

(4) 3 Jewish Returns

Return	Year	Number of *Returnees	Persian King	Jewish Leader	Main Accomplishment
1 st Return	538 BC	50,000	Cyrus	Zerubbabel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To rebuild the Temple ■ After abandonment for 15 years, Temple was completed after 20 years.
2 nd Return	458 BC	2,000 men	Artaxerxes	Ezra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To rebuild spiritual life of Jewish returnees
3 rd Return	445 BC	Small group	Artaxerxes	Nehemiah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To rebuild city wall of Jerusalem ■ Completed in 52 days despite resistance

* Returnee Jews – mainly from tribes of Benjamin & Judah.

1st Return (538 BC, under Zerubbabel)

- Jeremiah prophesied 66 years before Jerusalem & Temple were destroyed.

● “...after 70 years of captivity are over, I will punish the King of Babylon and his people for their sin, says the Lord.” (Jer 25:12)

● “The truth is that you will be in Babylon for 70 years. But then I will come...I will bring you home again.” (Jer 25:12)

- True to Jeremiah’s prophecy, in 538 BC, 50,000 Jews (from the tribes of Judah & Benjamin) returned to Jerusalem under leadership of Zerubbabel to rebuild the Temple of God.

Calculation of 70 years period Exile

- 2 methods of calculation.
- 1st Method: 1st Exile to Altar Rebuilt
 - 1st Exile – 605 BC
 - Altar Rebuilt – 535 BC.
- 2nd Method: Destruction of Temple to Completion of Temple
 - Destruction of temple: 586 BC
 - Completion of Temple : 515 BC
 - Scholars prefer 2nd method.

- How was it possible for the Jews to leave Babylon to go to Jerusalem?
- God raised the Persian Empire to overthrow the Babylonian Empire under King Cyrus to punish Babylonians for the excesses especially in destroying The Temple of God.
- Isaiah had prophesied earlier, 150 years before this event (668 BC), on the restoration of the Temple of God

- “When I say of Cyrus, ‘He is my Shepard, he will certainly do as I say, He will command that Jerusalem be rebuilt and that the Temple be restored.”
(Isaiah 44:28)

- Sure enough, the 1st thing Cyrus did when he became King of Persia was
 - he passed a proclamation to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. (538 BC)

- “In the 1st year of King Cyrus of Persia, the Lord fulfilled Jeremiah’s prophecy by stirring the heart of Cyrus to put this to proclamation in writing and to send it throughout the Kingdom.” (v1)
- “This is what King Cyrus of Persia says: The Lord, the God of heaven...He has appointed me to build him a Temple of Jerusalem in the land of Judah” (v2)
- “All of you who are his people may return to Jerusalem in Judah to rebuild the Temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, who lives in Jerusalem (v3)
(Ezra 1:1-3)

- Note: First thing God instructed Jews to do (through King Cyrus)
 - not to rebuilt Jerusalem but to rebuild God's Temple.
- Why? Temple of God
 - represents presence of God (Yahweh)

- Among the 3 super powers (Assyrians, Babylonians & Persians)
 - the Persians were kind to the Jews (not only allowed Jews to return to Jerusalem but facilitated & gave resources to rebuild the Temple).
 - Persia: today - Iran (now building nuclear bomb to wipe out Israel)

- The work started immediately in 538 BC but due to opposition from some locals and other reasons
 - the work was abandoned for 15 years.
- Haggai & Zechariah were called by God to urge the Jews to restart the rebuilding of the Temple.
- The Temple was finally completed after 20 years.
- Mission: to rebuild the Temple

2nd Return (458 BC under Ezra)

- 80 years later (after Zerubbabel's 1st Return) 2,000 Jews returned to Jerusalem under Ezra, the scribe
- He asked the King of Persia (now King Artaxerxes) for permission & the King make a similar proclamation not just to return to Jerusalem
 - but gave Ezra permission to take all the gold & silver (King Nebuchadnezzar stolen from the Temple of God) for the Temple.
- Ezra's mission was to rebuild the spiritual lives of the Jews who returned.
 - esp. inter-marriage with the local people forbidden by God.
- They experienced a spiritual revival after the people confessed their sins.
- Mission: to rebuild spiritual lives

3rd Return (445 BC under Nehemiah)

- 13 years later (after 2nd Return), Nehemiah (King's cup bearer) was given permission by King Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls that have been destroyed by the Babylonians
- Despite opposition from the enemies (from within and without), the walls were rebuilt within 52 days.
- Mission: to rebuild city walls of Jerusalem

Significance of the 3 Returns

- This led to the re-founding of the nation of Israel
 - after disappeared for 70 years.
- After these 3 Returns, the Jews grew into 1 nation of Israel (no more Northern or Southern Kingdom).
 - during the 400 years of silence.
- By the time Jesus Christ was born, Israel has become a nation
 - only to be demolished & dispersed in AD 70 by the Romans.
- Until it was re-founded in year 1948
 - thus there was no nation of Israel again from AD 70 to 1948 (approx. 2,000 years).
- Thus, Israel is the only nation on earth to have disappeared & re-established as a nation 2 times.
 - no other nation has achieved this incredible historic feat.

Major Lessons From Minor Prophets

HAGGAI

By: Tan Sin Liang

HAGGAI

Re-ordering Your Priorities With God

Key to Haggai: Put God First

Setting:

- (i) When book written: 520 BC (during 1st Return)
- (ii) Audience: Remnant Jews & returnee Jews(50,000) in Jerusalem
- (iii) Contemporary: Zechariah

1. Historical Setting

- Jerusalem is gone.
- Temple of God is gone: looted and burned to the ground
- Judah is gone.
- Both kingdoms of Israel & Judah are gone.
 - Jews lost their homeland (1st time)
- Surviving Jews exiled to Babylon.
- These are the darkest days of the Jewish nation.
 - Jews without a homeland & her people exiled as slaves & servants
- Price Jews paid for refusing to repent of their sins
- God, through his prophet Jeremiah, prophesied Jerusalem will become a wasteland for 70 years. (*Jer. 25*).
- After 70 years God will bring them home (*Jer. 29*)
 - after God had punished the Babylonians.
- God used the Persians to overthrow the Babylonians in 539 BC
- As prophesied by Isaiah in Chap. 44:28
 - God used King Cyrus to issue proclamation to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple.
- In the year 538 BC

- this royal proclamation was issued, paving the way to 50,000 Jews returning to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel
- these 50,000 Jews were from tribes of Judah & Benjamin
- The work started well with great enthusiasm & generosity (*Ezra 2:68*)
- Then the work was abandoned & the Temple of God laid in ruins for 15 years.

(2) Why was the rebuilding of the Temple abandoned?

- (i) Opposition from local residents (Samaritans) (*Ezra 4*).
 - They wrote to King Artaxerxes to stop the work & the King agreed.
- (ii) Excuse: that it was not the right time to rebuild the Temple (*Hag. 1:2*)
 - God, against all odds, brought the Jews home to Jerusalem (after 70 years)
 - now they are saying it's not right time to rebuild the Temple.
 - Why? Who decides?
- (iii) Wrong personal priorities (*Hag. 1:4*)
 - Jews began to spend time building beautiful homes for themselves.
 - whilst God's Temple laid in ruins.

Haggai's Mission

- The prophets that God appointed before Haggai's time were called mainly for 1 purpose:
 - to warn Israel to repent, otherwise judgment will come.
- Now that God has, after 70 years of exile, paved the way for the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple.
 - Haggai is now faced with a completely different problem.
- Problem: materialism. Seeking for material comfort has caused them to lose sight of their priority.

- The returnee Jews started the 'Temple Project' with great enthusiasm for the Lord.
 - but they got side-tracked by another attraction: building beautiful homes for themselves.
- Hence, the 'Temple Project' was abandoned for 15 years.
- Against this backdrop, Haggai was called by God to complete the Temple Project they have abandoned.
- Haggai's mission: To get the returnees Jews to restart the 'Temple Project'
- Haggai's strategy: To convey God's instruction in 4 messages.

Thought

- Sometimes we get enthusiastic when God called us to undertake a certain project or a ministry.
- We begin with great enthusiasm. But we soon lose interest
 - maybe due to lack of tangible results.
 - maybe due to internal disagreement or discouragement
 - maybe got side-tracked by other things.
- So the project / ministry is abandoned.
- Is that your experience?
- Perhaps we need to focus more on God, rather people or result.
- God never ask you to start a work He cannot complete.

4 Messages

- Haggai delivered 4 messages within 4 months.
 - compared to Jeremiah & Hosea (preached for 40 years)
- Though short, it was effective
 - 23 days after preaching, the rebuilding work started (after 15 years of abandonment).

1st Message: Call to rebuild the Temple

- One of the excuses why the Jews abandoned rebuilding the Temple was:

- "The time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house – the Temple."
(Hag. 1:2)

- The Lord replied, through Haggai: but it's the right time for you to build your own luxurious homes – whilst the Lord's house lies in ruins?

- "Why are you living in luxurious houses while my house lies in ruins? (Hag. 1:3)

- The returnee Jews got their priorities wrong
 - they allowed their personal interests take priority over God's interest (i.e. building the Temple).
- The returnees have forgotten their mission, their priority
 - why did they return to Jerusalem in the 1st place.
 - to build their brand new homes? Or to rebuild the Temple?
- Why did King Cyrus allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem?
 - to rebuild God's temple? Or to rebuild their own homes?

Thought

- There's nothing wrong in having fine nice homes – if you can afford it.
- God is not decrying over Christians owning nice homes / cars
 - Neither is God saying wealth is a sign of God's blessings ('prosperity gospel')
- What becomes wrong – when your pursuit of wealth & materialism overtakes your pursuit of love for God in your life. i.e. you love your wealth more than your love for God.
- It may not be 'building fine homes'
 - anything that takes the place of God in your life is idolatry.
- So what are the priorities in your life?
- Where does God fit in your plans?
- Are we making excuses why we're not putting where God should be in our lives?

Consequence of not putting God first

- Do you ever wonder why God has not blessed you in your life?
- Perhaps you have your priorities wrong.

- See what happened to the Jews when they put their priority into building their own homes (instead of doing what God has sent them to do in Jerusalem).
- God withheld his blessing while they labored in vain.

- “Consider how things are going for you.” (v5)
- “You have planted much but harvested little.
You have food to eat, but not enough to fill you up.
You have wine to drink, but not enough to satisfy your thirst.
You have clothing to wear, but not enough to keep you warm
Your wages disappear as though you were putting in pockets filled with holes.” (v6)
- “And when you brought your harvest home, I blew it away. Why? Because my house lies in ruins, says the Lord Almighty, while you are all busy building your own fine houses.” (v9)
- “This is why the heavens have withheld the dew and the earth has withheld its crops.” (v10)
- “I have called for a drought on your fields and hills – a drought to wither the grain and grapes and olives and your other crops, a drought to starve both you and your cattle and to ruin everything you have worked so hard to get.” (v11)

(Hag. 1:5-11)

- Because the Jews misplaced their priorities
 - God withheld his blessings
- Result? They labored in vain

Lesson

- Ever wonder why our plans are not working out? Perhaps our priorities are not right with God.
- Start thinking how we should re-order priorities in our lives.
- God will not bless us unless we get our priorities right with God.
- Otherwise, we labour in vain.

What was the result of Haggai’s preaching?

- The people obeyed & it sparked a revival.

- The Temple project re-started again & was completed within 5 years. (after abandoned for 15 years).
- This is the 2nd Temple
 - later on became 'Herod's Temple'

Thought

- Has God spoken to you to undertake certain task or to take up a certain responsibility in the church?
- Have you been putting on side-line for some time?
- My experience: Teaching CE & Heading Makarios

2nd Message: (Take Courage & Work For I Am With You)

- Before the rebuilding of the Temple of God was completed, some of the elders who saw the first Temple 66 years ago before its destruction
 - lamented that this new Temple was not as beautiful & glorious as the original Solomon's Temple.

- Many of the older priests, Levites and other leaders remembered the first Temple and they wept aloud when they saw the new Temple's foundation." (Ezra 3:12)

- Physically, it was not as glorious as the Original Solomon's Temple
 - that's why King Herod later expanded it & hence "Herod's Temple"
- But God was going to dwell in this rebuilt Temple
 - so why should Jews have any problem?
- The Lord spoke (through Haggai):

- "It must seem like nothing at all!" (v3)
- "**Take courage and work for I am with you**" (v4)
- "**My spirit remains among you**, just as I promised when you came out of Egypt. So do not be afraid." (v5)
- "I will shake all the nations, and all the treasures of all the nations will come to this Temple, I will fill this place with glory, says the Lord." (v8)
- *"**The silver is mine. The gold is mine**, says the Lord Almighty." (v8)
- "The **future glory of this Temple will be greater than its past glory**, says the Lord Almighty." (v9)

(Hag2:3-9)

*Fulfilled when Ezra brought back Temple Treasures during 2nd Return.

- As the Jews began to rebuild the Temple, discouragement set in.
- Haggai exhorted them to take courage & work for God is with them
 - God will equip & restore the Temple to its former glory with all the gold & silver

Lesson

- Sometimes in life we're more concerned about 'outward' appearance than what's inside, isn't it?
- Form vs substance

- most of all, the glory of this new Temple will even be greater than Solomon's Temple.
- 500 years later, Jesus Christ, Son of God would teach in this very same Temple they're now rebuilding with their bare hands.

Do not despise small beginnings

- "Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel's hand." (Zech 4:10)

Lesson 1

- Sometimes in serving God, you may face discouragement. Do you feel like giving up?
- God said: "Take courage and work for I am with you." "My Spirit is with you. Do not be afraid."
- Don't give up. God will see us through.

Lesson 2

- When God wanted to rebuild the Temple, he had all the resources to do it. But he needed willing hands to build his Temple
- God is always looking for men & women who are willing to serve him.
 - are you willing?
- Sometimes we fear undertaking a project / ministry because
 - lack of funds, lack of people, lack resources.
- But if it's God's will, we need not fear. As God said to the Jews in rebuilding the Temple.
 - "The silver is mine. The gold is mine" – in the end Ezra brought back all the Temple treasures for the Temple of God.
- If God has asked you to undertake a project, He'll provide you the resources.

Lesson 3

- When we serve the Lord, always start humbly. Start small.
- Do not let others discourage you by the small beginnings.
- Do not despise small beginnings.
- A ministry can start small but with God's blessings it will grow.

Lesson 4

- God is glad to see the 'plumb line' in our hands
- Plumb line represents the "tool" you use to do God work
 - to builder – plumb line
 - to Sunday School Leaders – your Sunday School teaching materials
 - to counsellor – telephone or bible (to comfort someone)
 - to preacher – commentator, Bible notes
- God is pleased when we are in the midst of such ministry doing his work.

Completion of Temple

- After abandoned for 15 years, after God's messages through Haggai
 - the Temple was completed within 5 years (Solomon took 7 years) in 515 BC.

3rd Message: (Call To Holiness & Blessings For Obedience)

(i) Call To Holiness

- The Temple of God was destroyed & burned to the ground by the Babylonians.
- The rebuilding of the Temple cannot be completed unless the foundation stone to the Temple is laid.
- Before the foundation stone to the Temple was laid, the Lord instructed the Jews to reconsider their personal spiritual lives.
- He told Haggai to find out from the priests what the law says to the following 2 questions:

- 1st: "If a person carries consecrated meat ('holy sacrifice') in the fold of his garment ('robe'), and that touches some bread or stew, some wine, oil or other food, does it become consecrated ('holy')? The priest replied, 'No' (v. 12)
- 2nd: "Then Haggai said, 'If a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches one of these things, does it become defiled?' 'Yes', the priests replied. 'It becomes defiled'. (v13)

- “Then Haggai said, ‘So it is with this people and this nation ‘says the Lord. Whatever they do and whatever they offer is defiled”. (v14)
- “Now give careful thought to this from this day on – consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the Lord’s Temple”. (v15)
(Haggai 2:12-15)

- When holy / consecrated meat in the priest’s robe touches other food, it does not make these other food holy / consecrated.
- However, when a defiled person having touched a dead body subsequently touches other food, it defiles them
- What is the lesson?

- Means: holiness cannot be passed on but defilement can
- like: health is not contagious but disease can

- What is the point God is making through Haggai?
 - God is reminding the Jews that they have allowed worldly values of materialism to influence & dominate their lives, they were prepared to abandon the rebuilding of God’s Temple.

Thought

- Tho ‘holiness’ cannot be passed on, ‘godliness’ can
 - my personal experience learning from my pastor, Hugh Smith.
- On the other hand, ‘ungodliness’ can also be passed on
 - e.g. ungodly behavior / conduct can influence and spread to other church members.
- Be careful how we lead our lives – may influence others.

(ii) Blessings For Obedience

- Finally, when the Jews came to the point of laying the foundation of the Temple (it was destroyed), the Lord said:

- “On this 18th Dec, the day when the foundation of the Lord’s Temple was laid – carefully consider this: I am giving you a promise now while the seed is still in the barn, before you harvested your grain and before the grapevine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have produced their crops. From this day onward I will bless you.”
(Hag 2: 18-19)

- Even before a seed is sown & before your fruit trees even bear fruits, God said: “I will bless you.”
- Even before the project is completed, (when the foundation of the Temple was laid), God said:
 - “From this day onwards I will bless you”

Lesson

- When people are obedient, God is ready to bless even before the assignment is completed.
- God need not wait for you to complete his assignment before he blesses you
 - means blessings in advance. (prospective blessing)
 - also mean: blessing come as you go along.
- Sometimes that’s how God encourages us to keep going.
- Key: obedience. Encouragement & blessings will come.

4th Message: (God’s Affirmation of Zerubbabel)

- 4th final message was for leader Zerubbabel himself.
- After prophesying that he will shake up the world and overthrow the kingdoms
 - God said he would honour Zerubbabel for what he is doing
- God would honour him with his own signet ring
 - guarantee of God’s authority. Why?
- “For I have specially chosen you” (Hag 2:23)

Thought

- God honours leaders.
- When God has specially chosen us to do his will
 - If we’re obedient to God’s calling, he will put his ‘signet ring’ on us to affirm us.
- How does God put His ‘signet ring’ on his chosen servant?
 - by affirmation from his fellow bros & sis.

Lessons learned

- What did you learn you can apply to your daily life?
- What did you learn about God?
- What did you learn about Haggai?

Major Lessons From Minor Prophets

MALACHI

By: Tan Sin Liang

MALACHI

The Last Messages Before The Voice Of The Prophets Fell Silent

Setting:

- When written: Approx. 430 BC (15 years after 3rd Return under Nehemiah).
- Contemporary: Nehemiah, Ezra (Haggai probably died).
- Audience: Jews in Jerusalem

Significance of Book of Malachi

- This is the last call
- The voice of Malachi would be the last prophet's voice the Jews will hear in the entire Old Testament era
 - before God impose a '400 years of Silence'
- The next voice they hear of a prophet would be the voice of John the Baptist, 400 years later.
- Being the 'last prophet' in the Old Testament
 - there must be something important in these last messages.
 - what are the last messages for the Jews?
- what can we learn from these last messages of Malachi?
 - are they relevant to us today?
- Book of Malachi bridges Old Testament and New Testament.

Background to Malachi's Messages

- The 2nd Temple of God has been completed (under Zerubbabel 85 years ago)
- The spiritual lives of Jews in Jerusalem revived (under Ezra 25 years ago)
 - prohibited mixed marriages with pagans dissolved

- The city walls of Jerusalem have been repaired by (Nehemiah 15 years ago)
- This should be a 'Shangrila Period' (euthopia).
- But the spiritual condition of Jerusalem was still in doldrums. Why?
- The Jews began to lose enthusiasm because
 - the exciting messianic prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah & other prophets had not been fulfilled.
- Many of the sins that brought down Jerusalem in 586 BC were still there.
- After Ezra's campaign to rid the mixed marriages between the Jews & the pagans.
 - crept back again. They began to enter into these prohibited marriages again.
 - After returning to Jerusalem 100 years ago,
 - indifference, complacency, malpractices & sins crept into the Jewish society in Jerusalem.
- Against this backdrop, God called Malachi. This is what he faced in this Jewish community in Jerusalem.
 - priests offering defiled sacrifices to God,
 - failure to tithe to God ("robbing God"),
 - marrying pagans (inter-marriage),
 - wanton divorces by men,
 - speaking against God.
- Altogether Malachi has 4 messages to the Jews.

1st Message: To the Sinful Priests (Spiritual Leaders)

(i) Unworthy Sacrifices

- The 1st message was to the priests (leaders)
- God accused the priests of offering defiled sacrifices.

- “God says to the priests: ‘You have despised my name!’ ” (v6)
- “But you ask, ‘How have we despised your name?’ ” (v7)
- “ ‘You have despised my name by offering defiled sacrifices on my altar.’ ” (v7)
- “Then you ask, ‘How have we defiled the sacrifices’ “? (v7)
- “ ‘You defile them....when you give blind animals as sacrifices, isn’t it wrong? And isn’t wrong to offer animals that are crippled and diseased?’ ” (v8)
- “ ‘I am not all pleased with you’, “says the Lord Almighty, ‘and I will not accept your offerings.’ ” (v10) (Mal 1: 6-10)

- Finally, the 2nd Temple has been rebuilt, now the priests are offering blind, crippled and diseased animals as sacrifices to God.
- Why? Because it’s cheaper than unblemished animals.

Thought

- Are we guilty of compromising or short-changing God in our worship?
- In our giving (tithes)? In the way we prepare for worship?
- In our attitude towards worship?

- This is direct violation of God’s Levitical law of sacrifice

Violation of Levitical laws

- “If your sacrifice for a whole burnt offering is from the herd, bring a bull with no physical defects to the entrance of the Tabernacle so it will be accepted by the Lord” (Lev 1:3)

- By giving such blemished animals as sacrifice in direct violation of the Levitical laws of worship
 - the priests showed utter contempt of God’s law. (i.e. no respect)

- “By bringing contemptible food, you are saying it’s all right to defile the Lord’s table.” (Mal 1:12)

- By allowing the people to use blemished animals as sacrifice to the Lord
 - the priests have allowed & caused the people to sin.
- Priests are supposed to guide people to honour God, not to sin

- not to stumble his people.

(a) Why have the priests backslided?

- The priests have departed from the Levitical Covenant by practising favoritism i.e. corruption (in allowing certain people to sacrifice blemished animals).

- “ ‘You have left God’s paths. Your guidance has caused many to stumble into sin. You have corrupted the *covenant I made with the Levites.’ says the Lord Almighty.” (v8)
- “So I have made you despised and humiliated in the eyes of all the people. For you have not obeyed me but have shown partiality in your interpretation of the law.” (v9)

(Mal 2: 8 - 9)

* Family line of Moses & Aaron. They were anointed and set apart to minister as priests (Num 1:1-3)

- These priests have ‘left God’s path’ – means left God’s calling as priests.
- These priests have compromised their calling

Thought

(1) Church leaders

- Sadly, there are pastors & church leaders who leave God’s calling (‘leave God’s path’)
 - for various reasons
- 2 pastor friends who have ‘left God’s path’

(2) Churches

- Today churches are also compromising their calling
 - By marrying non-Christians
 - by allowing gay-marriages
 - by taking liberal stand on homosexuality
 - by liberal teaching & labelling Bible as ‘outdated’ (God & Bible got ‘expiry date’?)

(b) Warning for the priests

- As spiritual leaders, for their deliberate sins, God had terrible warnings for the priests.

- “ ‘Honour my name’, says the Lord Almighty, ‘or I will bring you a terrible curse against you’.....” (v2)
- “I will rebuke your descendants....” (v3) (Mal 2: 2-3)

Lessons

Church Leaders

- Church leaders must set good examples to the church members
 - must not cause church members to stumble.
- God honours leaders (Haggai – Zerubbabel)
 - but God also hold church leaders accountable not to abuse their position & power (as these priests did)

2nd Message: To The Sinful People

(i) Prohibited inter-marriages with pagans

- God accused the Jews of marrying pagans (non-Jews)
- 25 years ago, Ezra supposed to have eradicated inter-marriage problem

The inter-marriage problem 25 years ago

- “.....The Jewish leaders came to me and said, ‘Many of the people of Israel, and even some of the priests and Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the other peoples living in the land.’ ” (v1)
- “They have taken up the detestable practices of the Caanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites.” (v1)
- “For the men of Israel have married women from these people and have taken them as wives for their sons.” (v2)
- “So the holy race has become polluted by these mixed marriages. To make matters worse, the officials and Leaders are some of the worst offenders.” (v2) (Ezra 9:1-2)

(a) Why God prohibited inter-marriage

- Jewish holy race becomes 'polluted' by mixed marriages with pagans.

- "Do not inter-marry with them (Hittites, Canaanites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites etc), and don't let your daughters and sons marry their sons and daughters." (v3)
- "They will lead your young people away from me to worship other gods. Then the anger of the Lord will burn against you, and he will destroy you" (v4)

(Deut 7: 3-4)

- By marrying pagans, Jews may end up worshipping pagan gods, thus angering God.

(b) Ezra's solution to inter-marriage problem

- When Ezra heard all these, he tore his clothes (hair & beard) (righteous anger)
- Those who heard God's word confessed together with Ezra before God (*Ezra 10:1*)
- they confessed they were unfaithful to God (*Ezra 10:2*)

- Ezra told those who married pagans to divorce their pagan wives and send their children away (*Ezra 10:3*)
- The names of these guilty Jewish men were published

(*Ezra 10:18-44*)

- So how come this inter-marriage problem re-surfaced again during Malachi's time (25 years later)?

- "In Judah, in Israel, and in Jerusalem there is a treachery, for the men of Judah who have defiled the Lord's beloved sanctuary by marrying women who worship idols." (v.11)
- "May the Lord cut off from the nation of Israel, every last man who has done this and yet brings an offering to the Lord Almighty." (v.12)

(*Malachi 2: 11-12*)

- Perhaps these were 'new' men

- Perhaps some never truly confessed & reverted to same sin.

Thought

- How does God view inter-marriages between Christians and non-Christians today?
- Should we allow our children to marry non-Christians?
- Should we ourselves marry non-Christians?
- Does the biblical objection against inter-marriage in Malachi applies to us to-day?

(ii) Cheating God with tithes & offering

- God accused the Jews of failing to tithe to God

- “Should people cheat God? Yet you have cheated me!”
- “But you ask, ‘What do you mean? When did we cheat you?’ ”
- “You have cheated me of the tithes and offerings due to me.”

(Malachi 3:8)

(a) Origin of tithing

- From the days of Moses, the practice of tithing:

- “A tenth of the produce of the land, whether grain or fruits, belongs to the Lord and must be set apart to him as holy” (v30)
- “The Lord also owns every tenth animal counted off from your herds and flocks. They are set-apart as holy.” (v32)

(Lev 27: 30-32)

The Giving of Tithes

- “You must set aside a tithe of your crop-one tenth of all the crops you harvest each year” (v22)
- “Bring this tithe to the place the Lord your God chooses for his name to be honoured....”(v23)
- “This applies to your tithes of grain, new wine, olive oil and the first born males of your flocks and herds. The purpose of tithing is to teach you always to fear the Lord your God.” (v23)

(Deut 14:22-23)

- The tithes we give to God is set apart as ‘holy’.

- Under Levitical Covenant, Levites were called to serve as priest, the tithes & offering go to the Levites because they were not allowed to own land.
- During Malachi's time, the people neglected in giving their tithes
 - some of the Levites had to go out to work, thus neglecting their priestly responsibilities

(b) Blessings to the Faithfuls who tithe

- But to the faithfuls (those who tithe), this is what God promised:

- “Bring all your tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do, says the Lord Almighty, “I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Let me prove it to you.” (Mal 3:10)

- God will open the windows of heaven to pour His blessings on us.

Thought

- Do you tithe regularly to God?
- If we withhold our tithes (which belong to God).
 - God will withhold his blessings from us.
- However, if we tithe, God say he will open the windows of heaven & pour out his blessings on us.
- God's blessings may be material or non-material
 - can be blessings on your health, your family, your career, your protection
- God says: “Try me and see. I'll prove it to you”.

(iii) Divorces by men (Mal 2: 13-17)

- Another sin God accused the Jews was the wanton divorces by men.
- Divorce at Malachi's time was practised exclusively by men.
- They were disloyal to their wives & ignored their wedding vows they made before God. This is what God had to say to these sinful men:

- “You cry out, ‘Why has the Lord abandoned us?’ I'll tell you why!
 - because the Lord witnessed the vows you and your wife made to each other on your wedding day when you were young.” (v.14)

- But you have been disloyal to her, though she remained your faithful companion, the wife of your marriage vows.” (v. 14)
- “Didn’t the Lord make you one with your wife? In body and body you are his. And what does He want? Godly children from your union.” (v. 15)
- “So guard yourself: remain loyal to the wife of your youth”. (v. 15)
- “For I hate divorces!” says the Lord Almighty. ‘So guard yourself: always remain loyal to your wife.’ (v. 16)

(Mal 2: 14-16)

Thought

- Rates of divorce (including Christians) in our modern society are escalating
- How do we as the church prevent divorces from increasing in our church?
- God’s advice (not just to men)
 - “Guard yourself. Always remain faithful to your spouse”.
- That’s the surest way to ensure your marriage against divorce.

(iv) Speaking against God

- Another sin God accused the Jews was speaking against Him.

- “‘You have said terrible things about me’, says the Lord.” (v13)
- “But you say, ‘what do you mean? How have we spoken against you?’” (v13)
- “‘You have said, what is the use of serving God? What have we gained by obeying his commands or by trying to show the Lord Almighty that we are sorry for our sins?’” (v14) (Mal 3:13-14)

Lesson

- We need to be more careful in our speech & our thoughts
 - certain things we say (or think) hurts God, grieves the Holy Spirit
- Have we said things like: “What is the use of serving God?” What do I gained by obeying God?
- Or say other things like:
 - “It’s so hard to serve the Lord” (Mal 1:13)
 - “Where is the God of justice?” (Mal 2:17)

Thought

- Some Christians believe that God will make them prosperous by becoming a Christian.
- When the prosperity does not come, they question God: “What is the use of serving God? What do I gain?”
- Essentially ‘prosperity gospel’. Wrong. No biblical authority
 - on the other hand distort true teachings of Christ
- Only teach people to be selfish & to be covetous – only benefit himself.
- How about benefiting God?

Call to Repentance

- Though the priests and people have sinned, God always provide a way out – repent & be restored to God.

- “Ever since the days of your ancestors, you have scorned my laws and failed to obey them.
‘Now return to me, and I will return to you’, says the Lord Almighty.”
(Mal 3:7)

3rd Message: To The Faithful Few

- Not all the Jews who returned to Jerusalem sinned against God.
- There was the “faithful few” who obeyed God.
 - throughout the various books by the prophets, God always remembered the ‘faithful remnants’.
- This is what God had to say the ‘faithful few’ through Malachi.

- A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honoured His name” (v16)
- “‘They will be my people,’ says the Lord Almighty.” (v17)
- “‘On the day when I act (i.e. Day of the Lord), they will be my own special treasure. I will spare them as a father spares an obedient and dutiful child.’” (v17)
- “Then you will again see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.” (v18)
(Mal 3: 17-18)

Thought

- Which group do you & I belong?
- The faithful few? (special treasure)
 - who fears the Lord & honour His name
 - who serve the Lord
- The nominal majority (with none of the above)?
- Be that 'special treasure' that God wants us to be

4th: **Last Message: Coming Day of Judgment**

- The book of Malachi is one of the rare prophetic books that ends with 'judgment' (most end with 'restoration')
- It's ominous that the last book in the Old Testament should end with a 'judgment' message.
- There're 2 parts to this last message
 - Day of Judgment for unbelievers.
 - Day of Rejoicing for believers.

(a) **2 Messengers**

(i) John the Baptist

- "Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. *(Mal 3:1)*

- This clearly refers to John the Baptist
 - who will prepare the 1st Coming of Jesus Christ
- When the voice of Malachi fell silence
 - the next voice of a prophet the Jews would hear is the voice of John the Baptist (400 years later).
- In a significant way, these closing chapters in Malachi
 - provide the 'bridge' between Old Testament & New Testament.

(ii) Christ the Messiah

- Malachi & John the Baptist – preparing the way for the coming of Christ the Messiah.

- the Messenger of the New Covenant

- “Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple.” (v1)
- “But who will be able to endure it when he comes”? (v2)

- “For he will be like a blazing fire that refines the metal....He will sit & judge a refiner of silver....” (v3)

(Mal 3: 1-3)

- This refers to the 2nd Coming of Christ
- God did not reveal 1st Coming of Christ to Malachi

(b) Day of The Lord: 1 event but 2 outcomes

(i) Day of Judgment (unbelievers)

- “The day of judgment is coming, burning like a furnace. The arrogant and the wicked will be burned up like a straw on that day.” (v1)
- “But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings. And you will go free, leaping with joy like a calve let out of pasture.” (v2)

(Mal 4: 1-2)

- The ‘Day of the Lord’ (final day of judgment) will be both a terrible & a joyous event.
- It’ll be a terrible day for those who do not trust & fear the Lord (non-Christians)
- But it’ll be a celebration & joyous day for those who fear & trusted in Jesus.

Day of Judgment (Matthew 25)

- “But when the Son of Man comes into his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne” (v.31)
- “All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” (v.32)
- “He will place the sheep at his right-hand and the goats on his left” (v.33)
- “Then the King will say to those on the right,
- “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the World.” (v.34)
- “Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, ‘Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil & his demons’ !” (v.41)

- ‘Sheep’ represented those who are true believers in Christ & obeyed him.
- “Goat” represent non-believers & pretenders.

(ii) Day of Rejoicing (for believers)

- For the believers (“sheep”), it’ll be a day of rejoicing
- God will not only welcome us into His Kingdom but also invite us to co – inherit His Kingdom!
 - what a tremendous privilege.

Thought

- Which group do you & I belong? “Sheep” or “Goat”?
- How do you ensure you’re a ‘sheep’ and not a ‘goat’?
- How about your loved ones? Your friends? Your colleagues?

Lessons Learned

- What lessons did you learn that are applicable to your daily life?
- What did you learn about God?