



HOPE VALLEY CHURCH

BIBLE STUDY: THE MINOR PROPHETS

WHY ARE WE STUDYING THE MINOR PROPHETS?

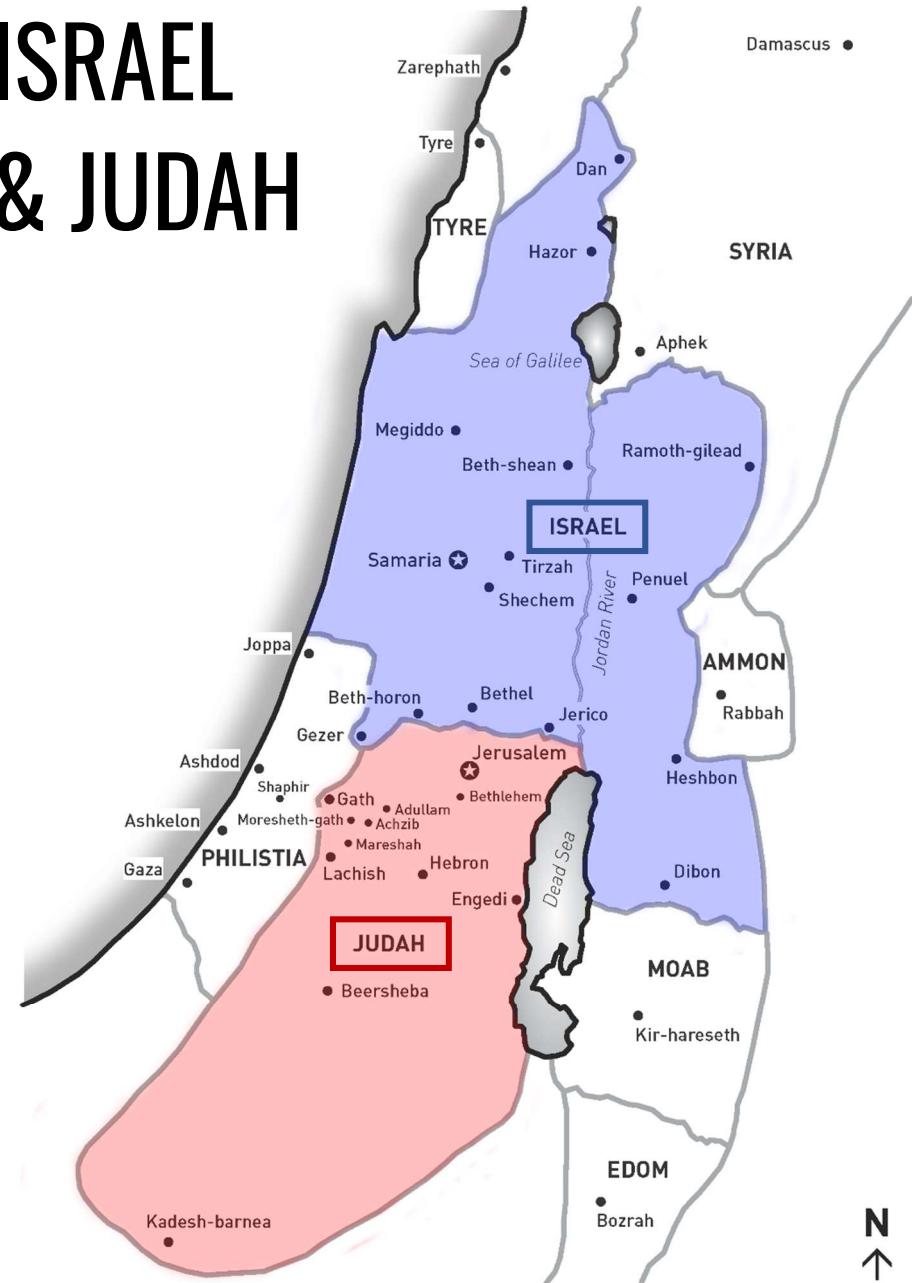
- To increase our understanding of the way God has worked through history
- To study aspects of God's character that we may not be as familiar with

WHAT THEMES SHOULD WE BE LOOKING FOR THROUGHOUT THIS STUDY?

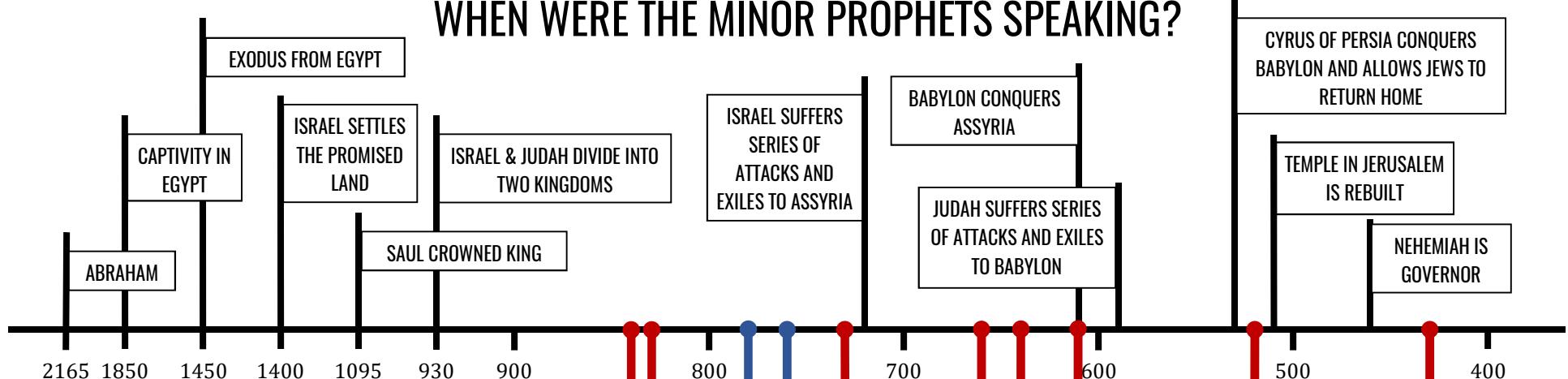
- God's character
 - Justice & Jealousy
 - Wrath & Judgment
 - Promises & Purposes
 - Redemption & Salvation
- Human Tendencies
 - Fickle Behavior and Unfaithfulness
 - Self-Idolizing
 - Generational Sin

Map of the Northern & Southern Kingdoms:

ISRAEL & JUDAH



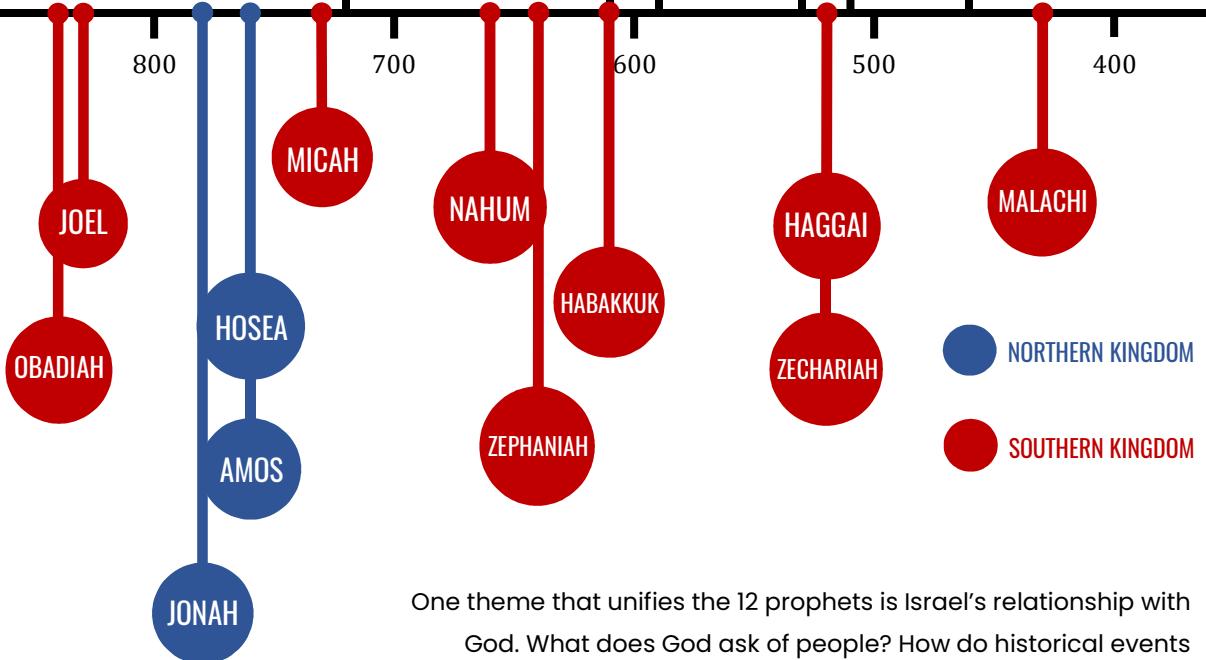
WHEN WERE THE MINOR PROPHETS SPEAKING?



MINOR PROPHETS?

The Twelve, also called The Twelve Prophets, or The Minor Prophets, is one book in the Hebrew Bible – but counted as twelve separate books in Catholic and Protestant Bibles.

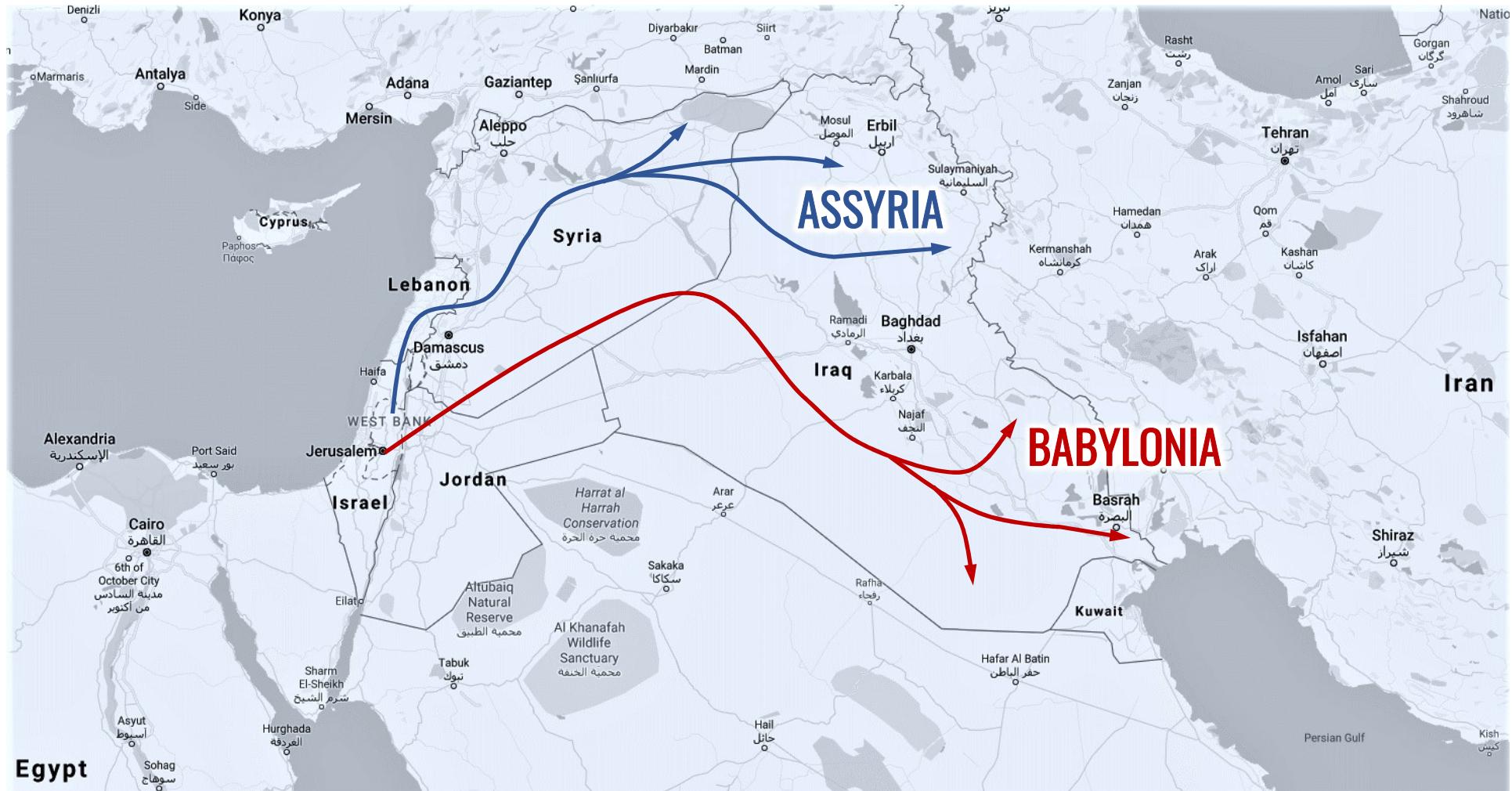
“Minor” refers not to their importance but to their length: All were considered important enough to enter the Hebrew Bible, but none was long enough to form an independent book. One of these, Obadiah, is only a single chapter long, and the longest (Hosea and Zechariah) are each 14 chapters.



One theme that unifies the 12 prophets is Israel’s relationship with God. What does God ask of people? How do historical events show God’s work? These are questions that appear throughout Biblical prophecy – but nowhere in the Bible does a single book present as wide a variety of points of view on these subjects as does the collection of the Twelve Minor Prophets.

MAP OF THE ASSYRIAN AND BABYLONIAN EXILES OVERLAID WITH MODERN MAPS

- ISRAEL – THE NORTHERN KINGDOM – FROM 734-721 B.C. WAS REPEATEDLY ATTACKED AND EXILED THROUGH ASSYRIA
- JUDAH – THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM – FROM 604-586 B.C. WAS REPEATEDLY ATTACKED AND EXILED THROUGH BABYLONIA



SOURCES USED TO RESEARCH AND BUILD THIS STUDY ON THE MINOR PROPHETS

www.understandchristianity.com | www.myjewishlearning.com | www.blueletterbible.org | www.netbible.org

KINGDOMS MAP – Mark Barry 2009 | EXILE MAP – referenced from www.conformingtojesus.com

OBADIAH

Approx. 845-830 B.C.

Background

Obadiah is named after its writer, whose name means “Servant of the Lord.” The specific time he lived and served is not known for sure. There is a late Jewish tradition that this was the same Obadiah who served as King Ahab’s God-fearing palace manager (1 Ki 18:3ff), but there’s little evidence for this. Obadiah is perhaps the most difficult Old Testament book to assign a date to. The words of Obadiah 11-14 give us the only clue about the lifetime of Obadiah, which may refer to one of two events: 1. the Babylonian intrusions and eventual conquest of the city in 605 BC, 597 BC, and especially 586 BC. 2. when Philistines and Arabs overran the city during the reign of Jehoram (see 2 Ki 8:20-22 and 2 Chr 21:8-20). The Edomites were likely allies in this offensive.

Content

The first emphasis is the judgment pronounced upon Edom (a nation of the descendants of Esau – Jacob’s brother) because of its pride and lack of love over Judah. The closely related second point made by Obadiah is that the Lord will eventually work deliverance for his people, a truth that is connected with the coming Day of the Lord as surely as is the downfall of their enemies. A third emphasis, more implied than explicitly stated, is the Lord’s supremacy over the nations. He rules universally, remains aware of the sins of nations, and administers divine justice over human governments. This truth permeates virtually all Old Testament prophecy.

Outline:

1. **Obadiah 1:1-9**
 - a. The Oracle Against Edom
2. **Obadiah 1:10-14**
 - a. The Cause of Edom’s Downfall
3. **Obadiah 1:15-21**
 - a. The Coming Day of the Lord, Justice against Nations, Deliverance and Redemption for Israel

JOEL

Approx. 830-800 BC

Background

It's difficult to ascertain precisely when Joel lived and wrote this book. The limited evidence we have supports the idea that Joel wrote his book late in the ninth century (approximately 830-800 BC), during the reign of Joash. The placement of Joel in the Hebrew Bible with Hosea and Amos also argues for this. The mention of Philistines, Phoenicians, Egypt, and Edom (Jl 3:4, 3:19) as enemies of Judah fits that time period. The absence of any reference to the activities or influence of the king may reflect the fact that Joash became king when only seven years old (see 2 Kings 11). Linguistically, the style of Joel is different from that of the post-exilic prophets, and there are unmistakable literary parallels with other pre-exilic prophets like Micah, Zephaniah, and especially Amos. Those who prefer to place the writing of Joel after the exile admit that Joel did use phrases and a literary style of early pre-exile prophets, but they see Joel 3:1-2 as clear evidence of the exile that has already taken place. They also cite the absence of any reference to the Northern Kingdom, the king, or the prevalence of high places as evidence of a later writing period.

Content

The content of the book is a clear preaching of law and gospel, with a powerful call to repentance and equally powerful promise of restoration and renewal. "The Day of the Lord" is his central reference, a day of both bad and good news. The call to repentance in view of the approaching Day of the Lord is memorable also because Joel sees that Day as one that spells the judgment for unrepentant Israel and also other enemy nations. But, the Day of the Lord also brings blessing for the faithful. The promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Messianic era (Jl 2:28-32; Ac 2:16-21) is perhaps the best known section because of its link to the Day of Pentecost. It serves to reinforce the truth that deliverance and blessings are linked to coming of the Day of the Lord just as surely as judgment and destruction are.

Outline:

- **The Lord's Day of Wrath and Judgment (Joel 1:1-2:17)**
 - **1:1-12**
 - Drawing attention to the destruction of resources and provision as a consequence of disobedience
 - One of the ways Israel and Judah had disobeyed was through idolatry and seeking success in their own power
 - Calls the people to recognize the judgment as a consequence of their actions – mourn and be ashamed
 - **1:13-20** – Calls the people to repent and look to God for provision
 - **2:1-11**
 - God's judgment and consequences will be carried out, and cannot be stopped or defeated.
 - **2:12-17** – God calls for people to repent and avoid the coming judgment
 - This is a foreshadow to what He would provide through Jesus
- **The Lord's Day of Salvation (Joel 2:18-3:20)**
 - **2:18-27**
 - Promises that God will restore the land and the people because of His love for them and His promises
 - **2:28-29**
 - Joel prophesies the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (**Acts 2:14-21**)
 - **2:30-3:21**
 - God will judge the nations
 - Even though Israel will go through their own punishment and judgment, the end result will be that God will protect and provide for His people forever while the other nations will be destroyed and will cease to exist.

JONAH

Approx. 760 BC

Background

Jonah's name means "dove." His hometown was Gath-Hepher located northeast of Nazareth in the tribal allotment of Zebulun in northern Israel (Jos 19:13), and his father was Amitai (Jon 1:1). All that we know about him and his ministry aside from what is provided in this book is revealed in 2 Kings 14:25. Jonah had predicted that the Lord would restore the boundaries of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 BC).

Regarding the authorship and date of writing, nothing explicit is provided in Scripture. It is assumed that Jonah had given his prophecy regarding Jeroboam's territorial expansion early in the king's reign or possibly during the reign of his father Jehoash (798-782 BC) when the restoration of ancient boundaries was begun (2 Ki 13:24-25). The events related in this book are not dated, however, and we do not know how long he lived or how long his ministry continued. One view is that Jonah himself wrote the book sometime after his return from Nineveh, perhaps near the end of his ministry. An estimated time of writing would then be about 760 BC.

Content

The central theme of the book of Jonah is the compassion of God and his divine right to show his mercy as well as his power wherever and whenever he chooses. In attitude and action Jonah serves as an object lesson for God's unfaithful people. The repentance displayed by Nineveh stands in stark contrast to the hardheartedness of Israel. Nineveh was located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River, and was the capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. It was the largest city in the world for some fifty years until the year 612 BC. One theme in this book is that the Lord here preserves Assyria from self-destruction long enough to punish Israel through Assyria. In view of the New Testament revelation that uses Jonah as a type of the buried and resurrected Christ (Luke 11:29-32), we can also see this prefiguring of the Messiah as a central theme of the book. It was this "sign of Jonah" that Jesus used to prophesy his resurrection on a number of occasions, calling people to repentance as Jonah called the people of Nineveh to repentance.

Outline:

- **Jonah 1:1-17**
 - Jonah is called by God to preach to Nineveh (v1-2)
 - Jonah disobeys and takes a ship in the opposite direction (v3)
 - God sends a storm to stop Jonah (v4)
 - Jonah convinces the crew to throw him off the ship to save themselves (v5-16)
 - God saves Jonah by sending a large sea animal to swallow him (v17)
- **Jonah 2:1-10**
 - Jonah prays to God from inside the animal
 - Jonah talks about God's punishment and Jonah's sorrow (v1-5)
 - Jonah talks about God's salvation (v6-7)
 - Jonah talks about God's greatness (v8-9)
 - God commands the animal to release Jonah onto the land (v10)
- **Jonah 3:1-10**
 - God redeems Jonah with a second chance (v1-2)
 - Jonah obeys God and preaches to Nineveh (v3-4)
 - Nineveh repents immediately (v5-10)
- **Jonah 4:1-11**
 - Jonah is angry that Nineveh has repented and God has forgiven them (v1-3)
 - Jonah confesses that the reason he initially disobeyed God was because he didn't want Nineveh to be forgiven
 - Jonah is so angry that he asks God to kill him
 - God uses an example of a plant to explain to Jonah how God values the lives of the people of Nineveh and doesn't want them to be destroyed (v4-11)
 - God points out how lost and hopeless – and therefore ripe for mercy – the people of Nineveh were

AMOS

Approx. 750 BC

Background

Amos' name likely means "burden" or "bearer of burden." He was from Tekoa which is about 5-6 miles south of Bethlehem, but his messages were directed primarily at the Northern Kingdom. His background was managing herds and cultivating sycamore figs (Am 1:1, 7:14). From his occupation and from the absence of his father's name, it is often assumed that Amos came from an obscure and poor family. On the other hand, his communication skills and depth of knowledge strongly argue against him being uneducated. He obviously knew the Pentateuch well, in content and literary expression. Amos served during the reigns of Uzziah (792-740 BC) and Jeroboam II (793-753 BC). This was a period of striking contrasts. On one hand, there was political stability, strength and economic prosperity. On the other hand there was spiritual apostasy and decay with formalism, social injustice, oppression, and exploitation. Amos testified boldly at Bethel, a main worship center of the Northern Kingdom until Amaziah, chief priest at Bethel, reported him to Jeroboam II as a traitor who expelled Amos from the Northern Kingdom (see Am 7:10-15). It was likely after his return to the Southern Kingdom that he committed to writing this summary of his prophecies. Hosea would have been a younger contemporary and successor of Amos.

Content

The repeated message of the book is the judgment on Israel because of the people's unfaithfulness toward God and their fellow man. Amos firmly opposes religious formalism and ritual without righteousness. Amos is quoted twice in the New Testament. Stephen cites Amos 5:25-27 as he performs a ministry parallel to that of Amos and indicts the hard-hearted Jews of his day (Acts 7:42-43), and James uses words from the Messianic promise (Am 9:11-12) in emphasizing the participation and freedom of Gentiles in the New Testament church (Acts 15:10). After the prophecies of Israel's destruction, we see the gospel promise of a Savior in Amos 9:11-12. The restoration of this tent culminates with Jesus, the Son of David.

Outline:

- **Amos 1-2**
 - Eight prophecies against eight nations
 - Damascus (1:3-5)
 - Gaza (1:6-8)
 - Tyre (1:9-10)
 - Edom (1:11-12)
 - Ammon (1:13-15)
 - Moab (2:1-3)
 - Judah (2:4-5)
 - Israel (2:6-16)
- **Amos 3-6**
 - Prophecies against Israel and its people
 - Cause and effect (3:1-8)
 - Destruction is coming (3:9-4:3)
 - Israel didn't respond to earlier warning (4:4-13)
 - Call to repentance (5:1-15)
 - Israel's injustices and arrogance (5:16-6:14)
- **Amos 7-9:10**
 - Prophecies of the coming destruction
 - Amos pleads for Israel to survive (7:1-9)
 - Amos exiled from Israel for prophesying (7:10-17)
 - The coming judgment of God will be complete and unstoppable (8:1-9:10)
- **Amos 9:11-15**
 - Promises of restoration and the Messiah

HOSEA

Approx. 750 - 710 BC

Background

Hosea (Hoshea) means “salvation” and is the same as the original name of Joshua (Num 13:8, 16) and the last king of Israel (2 Ki 15:30). He was the son of Beeri (Hosea 1:1) but aside from what is revealed in the book itself we know nothing more about him. It is assumed he was from the Northern Kingdom, but it isn’t sure (see Hos 7:5). The time period of Hosea’s ministry began during the years of prosperity and false security described in the introduction to Amos. The history of the Northern Kingdom then spiraled downward rapidly. The end was ugly and disgraceful - of the six kings that followed Jeroboam II, four were assassinated (Zechariah, Shallum, Pekahiah, and Pekah) and one was captured in battle (Hoshea). While the political scene disintegrated, the spiritual apostasy remained strong until the judgment from God swept the nation into exile. Amos had never identified the nation the Lord would use to punish the Northern Kingdom, but Hosea clearly revealed Assyria as the chosen instrument (Hos 7:11, 8:9, 10:6, 11:11).

Content

Echoing Amos, Hosea clearly exposes the apostasy of the Northern Kingdom and foretells its destruction. What distinguishes Hosea is the way he expresses the intense love and compassion of God for his people. The book portrays God’s faithful love for his people through Hosea’s marriage to unfaithful Gomer. The graphic depiction of spiritual adultery, the intensity of frustrated love, and the denunciations of religious formalism are key characteristics of the book. God had made a covenant with them and promised to bless them (Ex 19:5-6) yet they had broken the covenant by forsaking their God. Hosea’s love for his unfaithful wife reminds us of God’s unfailing love for his unfaithful followers. Hosea teaches us that when we sin, it isn’t just breaking a rule - it’s like cheating on our husband, Jesus. Yet thankfully Christ is fully faithful to us and has forgiven us by his death on the cross (Eph 5:25-27).

Outline:

- **Hosea 1-3 – The Unfaithful Wife and the Faithful Husband**
 - Hos. 1
 - Hosea takes a prostitute as a wife (Gomer) as a picture of the relationship God has with Israel
 - The names of their children reflect the judgments coming from God as a result of Israel’s unfaithfulness
 - Hos. 2
 - God will punish Israel and through it Israel will return and be faithful.
 - Hos. 3
 - Hosea buys his wife back as an example of God redeeming Israel
- **Hosea 4-14 – The Unfaithful Nation and the Faithful Lord**
 - Hos. 4-7 - Israel’s Unfaithfulness
 - God vividly describes how much the people eagerly engage in sin and enjoy their rebellion
 - The total lack of repentance or shame for their sin, is proven over and over
 - Israel constantly seeks help from every source except for God
 - Hos. 8-10 - Israel’s Punishment
 - Israel would be punished for their idolatry – fertility cults and temple prostitutes are cited multiple times.
 - Israel’s sin and the punishment coming is constantly tied to the very personal sin against God that they continually commit.
 - The Lord’s Faithful Love (Hos. 11-14)
 - Israel became proud and arrogant in the good things they had, forgetting that it was God who gave them those good things, healed them and provided for them.
 - Call to Israel to repent, turn to God and receive His healing and restoration

MICAH

Approx. 740 - 700 BC

Background

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Outline:

- **Chapter 1**
 - Verses 1-6 prophesy against Samaria and Judah
 - Verses 8-16 are a lamentation where Micah’s plays on the meaning of the names of the cities.
- **Chapter 2**
 - Verses 1-11 indict the people for their sins.
 - Verses 12-13 promises God will gather a remnant of Israel.
- **Chapter 3**
 - Verses 1-4 indict the rulers of Israel for their sins.
 - Verses 5-8 indict the false prophets of Israel.
 - Verses 9-12 indict the rulers and prophets of Judah.
- **Chapter 4**
 - Verses 1-8 prophesy the Millennial Kingdom.
 - Verses 9-10 prophesy the coming captivity to Babylon.
 - Verses 11-5:1 speak of the final battle of Armageddon.
- **Chapter 5**
 - Verses 2-15 prophesy Christ’s first and second coming, the period between and the Kingdom to follow.
- **Chapter 6**
 - Verses 1-5 call for repentance in light of God’s character and the history of what He had done for Israel.
 - Verses 6-8 show that God cares about character and the heart over sacrifice, formalism and rituals.
 - Verses 9-16 show that God must judge Israel for what they’ve done.
- **Chapter 7**
 - Verses 1-10 are Micah saying that God is right in His judgment and declaring that He will wait on God.
 - Verses 11-17 prophesy that the land of Israel will be left empty but afterward God will Shepherd the people, as the other nations are left in shame.
 - Verses 18-20 proclaim God’s heart to forgive, redeem and love Israel forever.

NAHUM

Approx. 663-612 BC

Background

"Nahum" means "comfort, consolation" or perhaps "compassionate." Little is known about Nahum and his hometown, Elkosh, is geographically uncertain, but was possibly in southern Judah, toward Gaza. The book of Nahum is placed between the fall of Thebes in Egypt (663 BC - mentioned as a past event in Nahum 3:8) and the actual fall of Nineveh (612 BC - which is here prophesied). Manasseh, Amon, and Josiah were kings in Judah during that period of time. By about 700 BC, Sennacherib had made Nineveh the last and greatest capital of Assyria. The empire and city reached its height (in glory and brutality) under cruel Ashurbanipal (667-627 BC), but by the end of his reign it was slipping fast. As Nahum made clear, their days were numbered. In 612 BC, a coalition of Babylonians, Medes and Scythians put a permanent end to Nineveh, as foretold by Nahum.

Content

The literary style of Nahum is highly poetic with the liberal use of similes, metaphors, vivid word pictures, and rhetorical questions. The subject matter of the book is the majesty and attributes of God (who is going to take action) and the downfall of Nineveh and the Assyrians (the action that God is bringing about). Nahum's bleak prophecy for the Assyrians is a reminder of the seriousness of sin. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23), as we hear in Nahum's description of God's just wrath upon sin (Nah 1:3). Yet Nahum also reminds us of God's goodness and love for his people (Nah 1:7), which causes Him to send Jesus, the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29).

Outline:

- **Chapter 1**
 - When God comes to judge and punish sin, no one can stop Him (**v6**). Now God's judgment, which had been focused on Israel, would be brought against the Assyrians because of their sin (**v12**). While Israel was left with descendants and not completely destroyed, Assyria would be completely destroyed and Israel would never have to fear them again (**v15**).
- **Chapter 2**
 - The coming judgment and destruction of Assyria is described as something that they will try to defend against, but will find themselves helpless to stop (**v10**). Assyria's pride and fame would be taken away (**v11**) and their neighboring countries wouldn't be threatened by them again (**v13**).
- **Chapter 3**
 - God speaks against the capital, Nineveh, directly, indicting the city for its sin, pride, plundering and enslavement of other people (**v1**). God cites what He had already done to Thebes in Egypt, as evidence that Nineveh would not be able to stand against His judgment (**v8**). In the end, all of Nineveh's people would abandon the city (**v17**) and the neighboring countries would rejoice over Assyria's destruction (**v19**).

ZEPHANIAH

Approx. 630-620 BC

Background

Zephaniah's name would mean "The Lord has hidden" or "The Lord has treasured or protected." His ancestry is provided in Zephaniah 1:1, but it is debatable whether or not the "Hezekiah" named is the famous king of Judah - the family tree with these names is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. However, the time of Zephaniah's ministry and message would make it possible for him to be of royal blood. This book can be placed in the decade of 630-620 BC, prior to the major reforms of Josiah (see Zeph 1:4-6, 8-9, 12, 3:1-3, 7) and prior to the fall of Nineveh (see Zeph 2:13).

Zephaniah's ministry began about the same time as Jeremiah, with Nahum as another contemporary. Many also express the opinion that the language used to describe approaching enemies was descriptive of a Scythian invasion usually dated about that same time and mentioned by Herodotus (an ancient Greek historian). The Scythians are said to have passed down the Philistine coast to the borders of Egypt as they plagued western Asia at that time.

Content

The theme of the book is clear: The Day of the Lord, the Day of Wrath, is approaching. Throughout the book, God is clearly rebutting common attitudes toward Him as someone people could dismiss. He uses the announcement of His coming judgment to bring attention to His attention to detail, decisive action, and sovereign authority. Besides Amos, Zephaniah is the only book among the Minor Prophets to feature a series of oracles against the nations - singled out for judgment here are Philistia, Moab and Ammon, Ethiopia and Assyria. The judgment that was declared against Judah was not viewed in isolation, but as part of God's overall agenda for judging and redeeming the world. As with other prophets of the Old Testament, Zephaniah's message is dominated by God's righteous judgment upon sin, not just for Israel but for the whole world (Zeph 3:8). However, his message is not only about judgment. He also proclaimed a gracious message of comfort for God's people. This not only gave the nation of Israel hope before they returned from exile, but it also gives hope to all believers who have been grafted into the family of God.

Outline:

- **Chapter 1**
 - God is promising action (judgment and punishment) against people who have dismissed Him. (**v6**) He states specifically that these same people claim He is complacent (**v12**) and they've stirred up His jealousy. (**v18**)
- **Chapter 2**
 - God calls all people to a change of heart from what He described in the last chapter (**v3**). He goes on to specifically judge nations who, in their pride, taunted Israel and spoke arrogantly against Him. He promises to humble them and destroy everything they've built, as a result. (**v10,11&18**)
- **Chapter 3**
 - God calls out the people who refused to be teachable and humble (**v2**). Even though God had done no injustice and had even given them a second chance to change their ways, they doubled-down in their corruption. (**v7**) God's decision was, therefore, to remove the unjust and unteachable people and promised that the end results of His action would leave people who were humble, teachable, just, and honest. (**v11-13**) and that those people would experience His love, redemption and peace. (**v20**)

HABAKKUK

Approx. 610-597 BC

Background

The meaning of the name Habakkuk in Hebrew might mean “one who embraces” or could actually be derived from an Assyrian word for an unidentified garden plant. Little is known for sure about him, but because of the heading and musical notations for chapter three, he may have been a Levite. Habakkuk’s lifetime and time of ministry are estimated from internal material, especially Habakkuk 1:6. It is clearly during that period of the waning of Assyrian strength and the rapid rise of Babylonian power near the end of Josiah’s rule and the beginning of Jehoiakim’s.

Content

The message and prophetic style of Habakkuk are unusual among the Minor Prophets. The book is not an oracle addressed to God’s people but a dialogue between Habakkuk and God – similar to Daniel’s revelations. Habakkuk represents the godly in Israel and asks questions that were on the minds of many, and the answers he receives are intended for that wider audience. This book deals with the topic of divine justice and the justification of God’s ways with humanity. The third chapter is interesting in that it has a designation for public and liturgical use, which is uncommon for the Minor Prophet books. The book carries the common theme of the Minor Prophets: God’s chosen people were disobedient to him, God promises that they will be punished for their unbelief, but God would restore a remnant back to the land of Israel. Jesus would later come from that remnant. Throughout this prophecy of judgment, Habakkuk displays the truth of his own words - that “the righteous will live by faith” (Hab 2:4). This beautiful truth is used by Paul and the writer to the Hebrews to show that faith in Jesus imputes the righteousness He won for us by His life and death (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:37-38).

Outline:

- **Habakkuk calls to God for action against injustice**
 - **(1:1-4)** Habakkuk boldly questions God about why He isn’t dealing with the injustice, violence, and sin that is happening all around him.
- **God responds to Habakkuk with His plan**
 - **(1:5-11)** God tells Habakkuk how He is preparing Babylon to come and bring destruction to Judah as punishment for their sin.
- **Habakkuk responds with concerns about Babylon**
 - **(1:12-2:1)** Habakkuk questions why God would use evil, corrupt people like the Babylonians. He is worried that the destruction the Babylonians will bring will be too great, they will go too far, and God won’t get any glory.
- **God responds to Habakkuk’s concerns with a promise**
 - **(2:2-20)** God promises that Babylon’s own greed, sin, and evil will bring destruction to them. Once they have fulfilled His purposes, they will be judged for their own sins, because they believe that their success is due to their strength and they do not recognize God as Lord.
- **Habakkuk’s prayer**
 - **(3:1-19)** Habakkuk recognizes God’s awesome power and authority to defeat His enemies, and makes the choice to wait in patience and in confidence for what God will do.

HAGGAI

Approx. 520 BC

Background

The name Haggai is commonly derived from or linked to the Hebrew word “hag” meaning “festival” or “festival sacrifice.” We know little about Haggai, but based on Haggai 2:3 some believe that Haggai had personally seen the Temple of Solomon and, if so, must have been at least in his seventies when he received these revelations. Haggai delivered his messages during a four-month period, from the sixth month to the ninth month of 520 BC (see Hag 1:1, 2:10, 2:20). Less than two months after Haggai began to deliver his oracles Zechariah began his work as companion prophet to the same people in Jerusalem. This was during the second year of Darius the Great, who ruled 521-486 BC. From Ezra (especially chapters 5 and 6) we know the historical setting for the work of Haggai and Zechariah - the building of the second temple had stalled and for some fifteen years the work had ceased. Ezra focused on the opposition to the project that stemmed from outsiders, but Haggai and Zechariah dealt more with the indifference and disobedience of the Jewish people who were not setting themselves to the task. The temple was later completed in 516 BC.

Content

The purpose and message of Haggai was to awaken the people of God to the responsibilities and privileges of their covenant heritage, especially in relationship to rebuilding of the temple. There are four brief prophecies (Hag 1:1, 2:1, 2:10, 2:20). In a style that Malachi would later use, Haggai makes good use of penetrating rhetorical questions. The repetition of “thus says the Lord” and its variations some 29 times in two short chapters, underscored the gravity of the message and urgency of the hour for the people of God. Since the temple represented God’s presence among His people, it’s easy to see why the message was weighty. Haggai prophesied that the glory of this rebuilt temple was going to be even greater than the first. Five hundred years later Jesus would be at this very temple to teach the people (Mt 21:23), to cleanse it (Jn 2:14-16), to receive praise (Mt 21:14-16), and to cause the curtain to tear in two after making peace with God for us (Hag 2:6-9; Mt 27:51)

Outline:

- **Chapter One**
 - God raises the issue that the people have returned to Israel but have put off rebuilding the temple (**1:2**) and connects this with the reality that nothing else they’re doing is satisfying them or providing anything lasting (**1:6**). God goes on to tell them that because they have put off building His house to build their own, He is withholding provision from them (**1:11**). In response, the people are stirred and begin construction (**1:14**).
- **Chapter Two**
 - One month into rebuilding, God encourages the people to work because He is with them, and not to be discouraged by the current state of the temple because the glory of the new temple would be greater than the old one (**2:4,9**).
 - Two months later, through a lesson in holiness and uncleanness (**2:12-13**), God reminds the people how their sin in not rebuilding the temple had robbed them of blessing across the board (**2:16**), but now because of their obedience they would be blessed and not need to worry about the coming crop season (**2:19**).
 - Later on the same day, God reaffirms His promise to David and his line through Zerubbabel, showing His promise of an eternal kingdom still stood (**2:23**).

ZECHARIAH

Approx. 520 - 518 BC

Background

Zechariah means, "The Lord has remembered" – a popular name also given to some thirty other Old Testament characters. He was likely both a prophet and a priest. His grandfather, Iddo, is mentioned in Zechariah 1:1 perhaps because he was distinguished as one of the leaders among the Levites who returned with Zerubbabel in the first wave of exiles (Nehemiah 12:1,4,7). Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai and the historical setting for both books is the same, with Zechariah's book probably spanning the two years of 520-518 B.C. and possibly beyond in the case of chapters 9-14.

Content

Zechariah made repeated references to "the earlier prophets" (Zech 1:4, 7:7, 12). This not only served to authenticate his own ministry, but also assured the people that they had not misunderstood the Lord's earlier revelations. A common theme of the book of Zechariah is the message of 1:3, "Return to me, and I will return to you." Another clear purpose of the book, as with Haggai, is rebuking and encouraging the people to finish rebuilding the temple, concentrated on the spiritual renewal of the people who would then carry out temple service once the building was completed. Zechariah's name is significant in this connection: "The Lord has remembered" his people and his promises, and this will be demonstrated especially in the ultimate humbling and exaltation of the Messiah. The series of eight night visions (Zech 1:7-6:8) reminded Israel that God still loved his people and would govern the destinies of nations for their benefit. The truth of God's sovereign control over all nations and peoples is also a noteworthy emphasis - the rule of the "Lord of hosts" would endure to the end and be realized in the work of the Messiah. Zechariah's message also shows a high degree of concern for social justice, emphasizing the kindness and mercy of God in the coming Messiah. There are a number of prophecies concerning Christ, such as details concerning his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Zech 9:9; Mt 21:1-11), his betrayal (Zech 11:12-13; Mt 26:14-16; 27:9), his disciples abandoning him (Zech 13:7; Mt 26:31), and his being pierced (Zech 12:10; Lk 24:39).

Outline:

- **Call to return to God (1:1-6)**
 - God calls for repentance and returning, citing the fulfillment of His promises and predictions.
- **Zechariah's Dreams (1:7-6:15)**
 - **1:8-17** – God is returning to keep His promise to restore and protect Jerusalem and Israel.
 - **1:18-21** – Destruction is coming for the nations that conquered and scattered Israel and Judah.
 - **2:1-13** – God is calling the exiles back to Jerusalem and other nations will be drawn to join the Lord there.
 - **3:1-10** – Joshua is appointed by God and called to faithfulness, awaiting Jesus' arrival and sacrifice.
 - **4:1-14** – Zerubbabel is appointed by God and called to rule by God's Spirit and not his own strength.
 - **5:1-4** – God's Word is going out over the world to convict and judge sin.
 - **5:5-11** – The sins of Israel would now be exiled to Babylon.
 - **6:1-8** – God's Spirit and peace was coming to the Northern Kingdom.
 - **6:9-15** – Jesus as the coming King and Priest is symbolized by placing a crown on the head of Joshua.
- **Call to recognize the second chance being given (7-8)**
 - The time had come to stop mourning. This new generation was being given the chance to do what their ancestors failed to do: live lives of justice, righteousness, and faithfulness in God's blessings.
- **The Shepherd (9-11)**
 - Jesus would bring judgment on Israel's enemies, and salvation and victory for Israel, but would also be rejected as Shepherd by the people.
- **God's Ultimate Work and Judgment of Nations (12-14)**
 - All Israel would later acknowledge and submit to Jesus.
 - Prophecies describing images of the final days of the earth, overlapping with John's visions in Revelation, of God's salvation and judgment.

MALACHI

Approx. 458-420 BC

Background

Very little is known about the prophet Malachi, since there are no cross-references in other biblical books and no genealogical heritage is provided (much like Obadiah). The name “Malachi” means “My messenger” or “my angel.” The Septuagint (*Greek version of the Hebrew Bible for Greek-speaking Jews in Egypt in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC*) treated the name in the opening verse as a descriptive title (“his messenger”) rather than a proper noun, suggesting the word is not a man’s name but the title of an anonymous spokesman of the Lord. However, since every other book of the Minor Prophets opens with the name of its chosen writer, it is probable that Malachi is a proper name and not a mere descriptive title, and the opening words of Malachi 3:1 seem to be a wordplay on his name. In establishing dates to the ministry of Malachi, there is no direct dating given in the text, but there are clues. The second temple had been built and the offerings were being given (Mal 1:7,10; 3:1) and a governor ruled the area (Mal 1:8). So it seems that Malachi served after Haggai and Zechariah. Comparisons between this book and those of Ezra and Nehemiah show close similarities between the religious and social ills being denounced, which could place Malachi anywhere from before Ezra’s arrival in Jerusalem (458 BC) to between Nehemiah’s two tours of duty as governor (from 433-420 BC).

Content

The themes covered in Malachi are similar to those also addressed in Ezra and Nehemiah. Covenant faithfulness, in attitude as well as action, remained a central message. The prophet’s use of penetrating and rhetorical questions is powerful and effective, with 47 of the 55 verses of the book addressed to Israel in the first person. The people of Israel were once again backsliding, and Malachi’s messages used the promise of the coming Messiah to encourage faithfulness. Malachi also prophesied about one whose work would be the final preparation before the Savior (Mal 3:1; 4:5-6). This was John the Baptist, who turned the hearts of the people back to God just before Jesus’ ministry began.

Outline:

- **God reminds Israel of His love (1:1-5)**
 - God reminds Israel that from the very beginning He has chosen them based on His love, rather than their own merit (**v2**).
- **God addresses the Priests of Israel (1:6-2:9)**
 - God accuses the Priests of dishonoring Him (**v1:6**) by offering sacrifices that were their worst animals rather than their best (**v1:8**). They were treating the sacrifices as unimportant and tiresome, rather than showing God the honor He deserved (**v1:11-12**). The Priests were also failing to properly teach people the truth and proper worship, to the point of leading them into sin (**v2:8**) and so God was causing the people to lose respect and ignore the Priests (**v2:9**).
- **God addresses the people’s sins (2:10-17)**
 - God cites not just their sins against Him (**v11**) but also their sins against each other (**v16**) as an offense against Him as the Father of their one family (**v10**).
- **God is sending two messengers (3:1-5)**
 - The first messenger would be John the Baptist, and the second messenger (Messenger of the Covenant) would be Jesus (**v1**) who goes on to be further described in the next two verses (**v2-3**).
- **God addresses the people’s disobedience in tithing (3:6-12)**
 - God calls the people to reconcile with Him by bringing their tithes and offerings to Him (**v8-9**). The connection there is that giving was an act of worship that showed their dependence on God for provision and their thankfulness to Him for blessing them (**v10**).
- **God addresses the accusations made against Him (3:13-4:6)**
 - The people were saying that following God was pointless, because evil people were doing better than they were (**v3:14-15**). God responds by promising that He pays attention and that both good and evil would be repaid (**v4:1-3**). Furthermore He would be sending a messenger to turn people’s hearts back to what is right (**v4:6**).