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DISCIPLESHIP TRACK, YEAR 3
OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY
THE MINOR PROPHETS: RETURN TO ME

An Old Testament Survey
Presented to Fireside Reformed Baptist Church
in Elizabethtown, Kentucky

by
The Men of Fireside
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1.

HOSEA-MALACHI

MINOR PROPHETS: RETURN TO ME

Main Point of Second Passage of Scripture

The minor prophets are usually referred to as “the book of the twelve.” They are a collection of shorter writings, hence the term minor prophets, that God sends to his people to proclaim coming judgement. We will look at these twelve prophets, their specific message God gave them, and who they took that message to. The message of “The Twelve” contains three major themes that is reflected in their core message.

Failing to keep the law. The first theme is failure to keep the law. Each of the minor prophets has a distinct message for the people whom God sent them to, and each deal with how the accused have failed to keep God’s law.

Judgement on “The Day of the Lord.” When someone is convicted of a crime in a court of law, they are judged by a jury of twelve people. Where does that number come from? Why twelve people on a jury? It is because the biblical number that symbolizes and represents judgment is twelve. Twelve prophets can pass judgment, and our legal system has twelve jurors to convict a suspect of breaking the law. Of all twelve of God’s prophets, ten of them describe judgement as “the Day of the Lord.”

The love of God. Finally, we can clearly see God’s love demonstrated in his patience, forgiveness, and restoration of his people. Amid their sin, rebellion, and idolatry, God continually calls Israel back to himself with the phrase, “return to me.”¹

¹ Zech 1:3; Mal 3:7

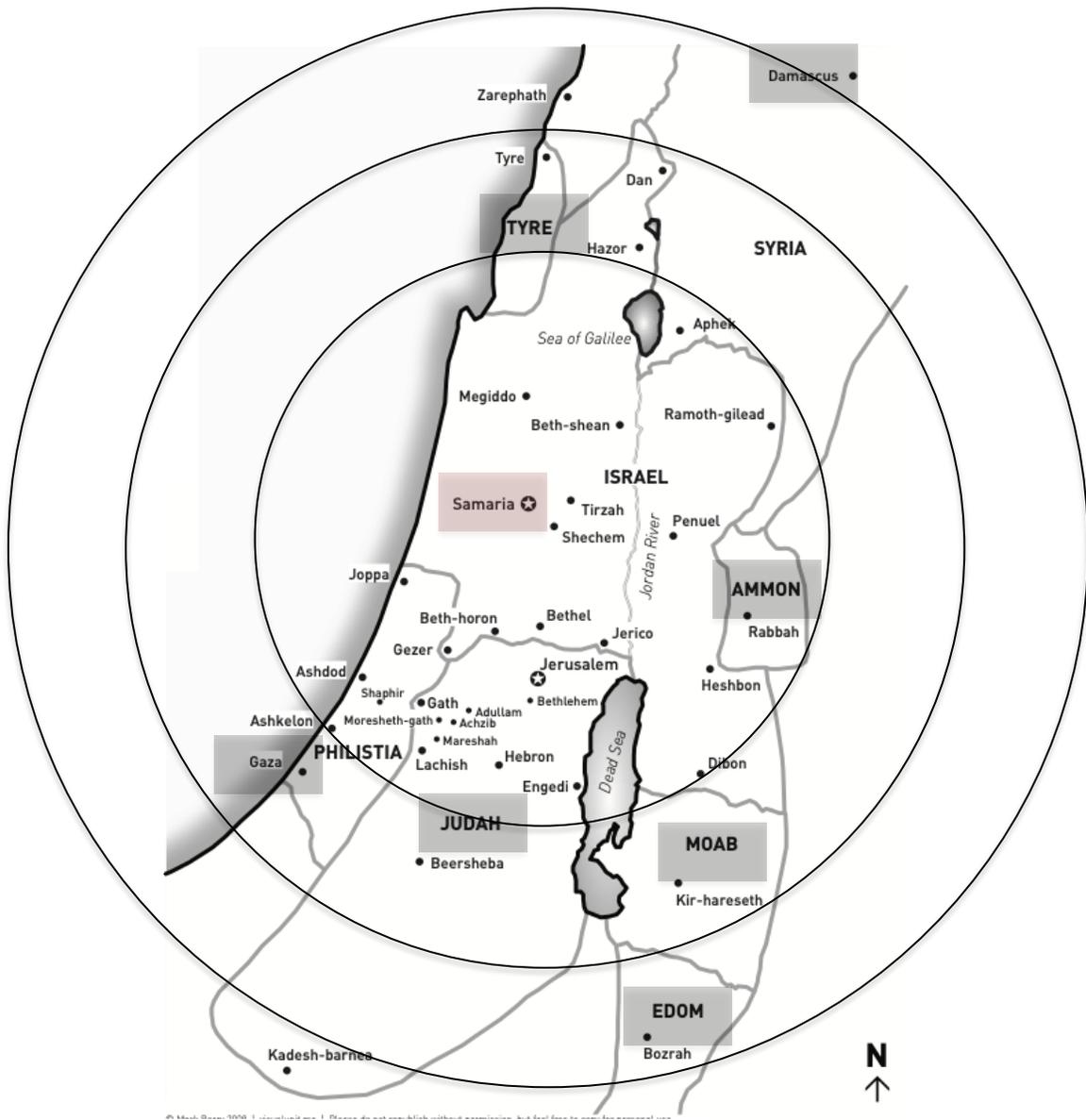
Amos: A plumbline shows in Amos' book, the grim results when God forsook.

Amos is a simple shepherd (1:1) and a fig tree farmer (7:14) from Tekoa, a village in Judah. He is not a priest or scribe, yet God chooses him to be a prophet. His assignment is to take God's message of coming destruction to the northern kingdom of Israel (7:11), who was under the rule of king Jeroboam II (1:1). The northern kingdom was prosperous and secure, however in the eyes of the prophets Jeroboam II was one of the worst kings in all Israel. Israel's prosperity led to apathy, Canaanite idol worship, and this led to injustice and neglect of the poor. So went north, to the town of Bethel, and started proclaiming the accusations and judgements of the Lord, and the collection of Amos' words are his prophecies, poems, sermons, and visions.

Main message. The core of Amos' message is that although God confronts humanity's evil, his goal is not simply to punish. God's purpose for confronting sin is to restore creation and create a new family. Amos' message says that genuine worship of God must include a life of justice, righteousness, and love for people. Amos' mission is directed to his neighbor to the north, Israel. His messages of impending doom and captivity for the nation because of her sins are largely unpopular and unheeded, however, because such prosperity has not been seen in Israel since Solomon's day. Amos' ministry takes place while Jeroboam II reigns over Israel, and Uzziah over Judah.

Amos 1-2: Accusations against the nations and Israel. The prophecies of Amos come in three sections. The first section consists of accusation from God against Israel's neighbors that are far away, like Damascus, Gaza, Edom, and Tyre. But the accusations come against neighbors that are closer, like the Ammonites and Moab. Then accusations come against Judah, close neighbors to the south. Finally, the accusation comes against the people of Israel themselves (2:6). It's like God is painting a target where Israel is at the center.

Walking in rounds. In military terms, this is called “bracketing” or “walking in rounds.” Artillery falls beyond the target, and then the adjustments are made. The next round fall short of the target – *but it is closer*. Adjustments are made until the rounds fall closer and closer. Finally, the round lands the intended target: Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom.



Amos 3-6: Exposing Israel's hypocrisy and injustice. When the final artillery round hits the intended target, that's not the end. Once on target, the next command is "fire for effect." Now that you are on target, you send a barrage of rounds "for effect." This is what Amos does now that he has his target in sight. The accusation against Israel is three times as longer, and far more condemning than the charges against Israel's wicked neighbors. The wealthy ignore the poor, and this leads to grave injustices. The rich allow the poor to be sold into slavery and deny them any legal way out of it. Essentially, it's human trafficking. The people they were enslaving was Edom – their relatives (Jacob and Esau; Israel and Edom). Amos asks, Israel if they are not the same people that God rescued you from slavery and oppression in Egypt, and now they are doing the same thing – to their relatives? So, God punished his children so they would learn to turn from their wickedness, but they did not learn. Amos declares five times that Israel, "did not return to [God]" (4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11).

Amos 7-9 – Visions of the Day of the Lord. Amos also prophesies about a series of visions regarding Israel's judgement. One of those visions was that of a plumb line (7:7-8). A plumb line is a string or chord with a weight attached to one end. When the cord is held so that the weight can dangle freely, an exact vertical can be determined. Painters and carpenters use plumb lines to keep their work straight. So, the purpose of a plumbline is to determine a straight vertical, or "upright" line. In Amos' vision, God measures his people and shows they are not "upright," rather they are crooked. God then warns they are about to meet their Judge (7:12).

Reflection and response. Israel's pursuit of prosperity and life of luxury was far more important to them than holiness, faithfulness, justice, and righteousness (4:1-5). They forgot about the law, and in turn they became lawless. We too are not to forget that in the pursuit of education, employment, money, and happiness that our first obligation is to God, his law, righteousness, and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

Summary and Conclusion

To fully comprehend the core message of the Minor Prophets, it's important to understand that the New Testament identifies Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah and the ultimate prophet of God. While the minor prophets looked forward with anticipation to the Messiah's arrival, Christians look back on it. As the New Testament affirms, the minor prophets testify to Jesus' birth (e.g., Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1), public ministry (e.g., Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:5), death (e.g., Zechariah 12:10; John 19:34–27), and resurrection (e.g., Jonah 2:10; Matthew 12:39–41). Jesus also taught that the Old Testament prophets testified about Him (Luke 18:31; 24:44–47). So, the minor prophets don't simply teach us to live according to laws, they teach us how to live like Jesus – the fulfillment of all the prophets.

Discussion Questions

There are two sections of questions: group and personal. Both sets of questions can be covered while at Discipleship Track. However, you are also encouraged to take the personal questions home and think about in your personal life from day to day and discuss with your parents. This way, you can have your parents encourage you, pray for you, and help walk with you as you seek to grow in Christ.

Group Questions and Discussion

1. **Major study of the minor prophets.** How familiar are you with the minor prophets? How many other minor prophets can you name? Who did God send each of them to speak to? Do you know their messages? How were their messages received?
2. **The plumbline.** What is the “plumbline” that God uses to determine if something is “straight,” or “upright?” In other words, what is the standard that God uses to measure whether his people are “straight” or “crooked?” Why is it important to know the standard by which God will judge us?
3. **Return to me.** What are some ways you see our nation turning from God’s rules?

Personal Questions and Application

4. **Major study of the minor prophets.** Would you commit to picking one of the minor prophets and studying his message? Maybe you could do this with your mom or dad, or maybe you could do it on your own and write a short paper.
5. **The plumbline.** When you take the “plumbline” of God’s word, where does your life deviate from being straight? Are there any crooked areas in your life that need to be straightened out? How would you know what areas are crooked?
6. **Return to me.** How could you get help from someone to encourage you to return to God regarding the areas of your life that are not straight?