

# An Introduction to the Minor Prophets Twelve Books of Adventure

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As we begin our new study, a word of warning about where we will be going. We will be covering some history, some textual criticism, a little bit of the unseen realm, God's attributes; and we will struggle to get our arms around several of the major concepts dealing with prophets and what it all means.

We are grouping the next 12 books we are going to study into what is called the Minor Prophets. Twelve prophets who stood for the truth of God, twelve prophets who were specifically called of God to communicate a very specific message to audiences as varied as the nations. The Hebrew Bible though lists them very differently than what we are about to discuss. This is how we are going to define them though, the Minor Prophets.

The first time they are aggregated together as a unit is in the apocryphal book of Sirach.

## Sirach 49:10

"May the bones of the Twelve Prophets send forth new life from where they lie, for they comforted the people of Jacob and delivered them with confident hope." (NRSV)

Even though, as we will see in our study, the message was not always specific to the Jews, it did always come back to how the Lord was intending to care for His people even to the point of allowing them to see how He dealt with the nations around them.

Stephen also referred to the Minor Prophets quoting Amos in his message to the same Jewish leadership that killed him.



#### Acts 7:42-43

"But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: " 'Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon." (ESV)

How did these find their way into the Old Testament canon? Probably through Ezra and Nehemiah.

According to Jewish tradition, the collection of the sacred books generally is attributed to the men of the Great Synagogue, a body of learned Scribes, said to have been formed by Ezra, and continuing in existence till the time of Simon the Just, who flourished early in the third century before Christ. In the opinion of many, Nehemiah completed this collection, by adding to those books which had already obtained a place in the canon, such as had been written in, or near his own times. (Henderson 1845, iv)

On the completion of the canon these twelve writings were put together, so as to form one prophetic book. This was done "lest one or other of them should be lost on account of its size, if they were all kept separate," as Kimchi observes in his Praef. Comm. in Ps., according to a rabbinical tradition. (Keil and Delitzsch 1996, 1)

#### 2 Maccabees 2:13

"The same things are reported in the records and in the memoirs of Nehemiah, and also that he founded a library and collected the books about the kings and prophets, and the writings of David, and letters of kings about votive offerings." (NRSV)

They were all included in the LXX.

About the moniker, minor prophet. This does not mean the message is a minor message or the prophecy a minor one. "To these twelve prophetical books the epithet "Minor" has been applied, simply on the ground of their size, compared with that of those which precede them, and not with any view of detracting from their value, or of representing them as in any respect inferior in point of authority." (Henderson 1845, iv-v)

When taken, therefore, in connection with the writings of the greater prophets, they comprehend all the essentials of that prophetic word, through which the Lord equipped His people for the coming times of conflict with the nations of the world, endowing them thus with the light and power of His Spirit, and causing His servants to foretell, as a warning to the ungodly, the destruction of the two sinful kingdoms, and the dispersion of the rebellious people among the heathen, and, as a consolation to believers, the deliverance and preservation of a holy seed, and the eventual triumph of His kingdom over every hostile power. (Keil and Delitzsch 1996, 1)

The message though is the same as with all the prophets. The sovereignty of God, the Holiness of God and the love and grace of God. The need for repentance also plays a primary message.

"An awareness of holiness was the driving force behind their sharp denunciations of sin. It makes no difference where the sin was found, whether in foreign lands (Edom, as in Obadiah; Assyria, as in Nahum) or among God's people—it was still an offense to God and called for judgment. Nowhere in the Bible are there stiffer denunciations of sin and heartier calls for a deep and pervasive repentance than in the Minor Prophets. Apart from repentance, judgment falls." (Boice 2002, 10)

Remember that term...repentance...it is a really big deal.

Let's take a first glance at the 12 books and who they were originally written to. Terms to remember, Israel = the Northern Kingdom and Judah = the Southern Kingdom.



## **Minor Prophets**

- Hosea Israel 748 686 BC
- Joel Judah 835 796 BC
- Amos Israel 786 746 BC
- Obadiah Edom 848 841 BC
- Jonah Assyria 771 754 BC
- Micah Judah 750 686 BC
- Nahum Assyria 661 BC
- Habakkuk Judah 625 597 BC
- Zephaniah Judah 640 608 BC
- Haggai Judah 520 BC
- Zechariah Judah 520 480 BC
- Malachi Judah 455 432 BC

We are going to be studying 12 books, really 12 different ministries. "These twelve prophets who stood for the truth of God had little in common with one another. They did not act as a group. The few who were contemporaries gave no indication that they knew one another, although Micah does share one passage with the major prophet Isaiah (Mic. 4:3; Is. 2:4), and Jeremiah quoted Micah in a narrative section a century after Micah's lifetime (Jer. 26:18).

Amos seems to have influenced Isaiah (Is. 5:11–13; Amos 6:1–7), and Jeremiah had a fondness for Hosea. Even Haggai and Zechariah, contemporaries in Jerusalem among the returned exiles from Babylon who were committed to the rebuilding of the temple, did not refer to one another." (Hayford and Snider 1995)

For those of you still wondering about the Hebrew Bible, the Tanakh, and how it differs from our Bible.

The Tanakh uses the following:

- The Law
- The Prophets
  - o Joshua
  - o Judges
  - o 1 & 2 Samuel
  - o **1 & 2 Kings**
  - o Isaiah
  - o Jeremiah
  - o Ezekiel

## • The Twelve Minor Prophets

- The list of books is the same as those we consider the Minor Prophets, or the last twelve books of the Old Testament
- The Writings
  - Psalms
  - o Proverbs
  - o Job
  - The Song of Songs
  - o Ruth
  - o Lamentations
  - o Ecclesiastes



- o Esther
- o Daniel
- o Ezra
- o Nehemiah
- o 1 & 2 Chronicles

Immediately we see there are some differences. We would consider Daniel a prophet, yet the Tanakh places Daniel in the writings. We are not told about all the prophets or prophetesses though that ministered throughout the time of the Old Testament.

God commissioned each prophet to fulfill a particular role—to be "the servant of the Lord." The prophets conveyed God's message to men, and as "men of the Spirit" they had special abilities to carry out their tasks. As "interpreters," they explained God's acts to men; as "seers," they saw what was hidden from others; as "spokesmen," they voiced God's truth. (Packer, Tenney and White, Jr. 1997, 344)

So, what did it mean to be a prophet of the Lord?

"The best way for us to learn what the word "prophet" means in the Scripture is to examine its use there. In the Bible, the prophet was the one who spoke for God. The Lord made Moses "as God to Pharaoh," and Aaron his brother was his "prophet" (Exod. 7:1). This is, of course, just an analogy. Moses was not the ultimate authority; he could speak only as God commanded. Earlier in Exodus 4:16, we learn that Aaron was to be as a "spokesman" or "mouth" of Moses who was as God to him. This means that the prophet is "God's spokesman" or "God's mouth." When the Lord gave His standard for the prophets to come, including Christ, He said, "I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him" (Deut. 18:18).

The term "prophet" implies that he was a forthteller, but not necessarily a foreteller. The greater portion of their work was to their own generation...The thing that made one a prophet was not that he was foretelling the future, but that he was speaking the word of God as the Spirit directed him." (Jenkins 1989, 2-3)

And one more thing, not all the prophets we read about in the scriptures were men.

Rabbinical tradition says "48 prophets and 7 prophetesses that prophesied to Israel, for all of them [together] failed to make them [i.e., Israel] return to their proper state..." (Neusner 2011, 68)

Seven prophetesses Who are they? Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther. (Neusner 2011, 69)

For our purposes then, as we begin our examination of the Minor Prophets, "a general definition of prophet or prophetess is a person who acts as a mouthpiece for God, receiving a message from him and proclaiming it in accordance with his commands. However, this term could also be used of one (false prophet) who pretended or actually believed that he or she was a mouthpiece of God. This definition would also point out the fact that prophecy was not exclusively predictive. A prophet was both an intermediary and an intercessor." (Warren 2003, 7)

In addition, it appears that a common factor seen in the Old Testament, common to all prophets, is that they had a personal job interview with the Divine Council. This is a pattern we see going running throughout the scriptures starting with Adam, Enoch, Noah, the Patriarchs and others to include the Prophets.

What is the Divine Council that these job interviews took place with. Remember, prior to the fall, Adam had access to God, the Council and those other created beings we see in the Bible, the heavenly host.



# The Divine Council

God alone created humankind to function as his administrators on earth. But he has also created the other elohim of the unseen realm. They are also like him. They carry out his will in that realm, acting as his representatives. They are his heavenly council in the unseen world. We are God's council and administration in this realm. (Heiser 2015, 43)

Prior to the fall, it was God's intent that both humans and divine beings would be in God's council. Adam was part of that.

The book of Job predates the Torah. It teaches us a bit about the operation of the Divine Council, some history, and several other topics. When Eliphaz spoke up and provided his "miserable comfort" (Job 16:2) to Job, we learn something.

Job 15:7-8 "Were you the first man born? Were you created before the hills? Have you listened in on the council of God? Have you sole possession of wisdom?" (Jewish Publication Society 1985, Job 15:7-8)

Of course Job was not the first man—Adam was. Job had not listened in the council of God (Hebrew: sod eloah), but the rhetorical contrast implies that Adam had listened in the council of God. This would make sense, given that Adam lived in Eden, the meeting place of the council, and that it had been God's intent for human beings to be his earthly children and human members of his council. (Heiser 2015, 233)

The rebellion of Genesis 3 ended that temporarily but that is still God's intent. We see it finally fulfilled in Revelation 4.

In Isaiah, we have recorded for us, his job interview with the Divine Council. "I heard the voice of the sovereign master say, "Whom will I send? Who will go on our behalf?" I answered, "Here I am, send me!"" (Isaiah 6:8, NET)

Ezekiel also tells us about his interview. "I saw an amber glow like a fire enclosed all around from his waist up. From his waist down I saw something that looked like fire. There was a brilliant light around it, like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds after the rain. This was the appearance of the surrounding brilliant light; it looked like the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I threw myself face down, and I heard a voice speaking. He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet and I will speak with you."" (Ezekiel 1:27–2:1, NET)

The benê 'ēlîml'e lōhîm, the divine ones (the heavenly host) are members of the entourage, the host, the assembly of Yahweh. That the divine council is a fundamental dimension of Israel's understanding of the Lord's governance of the universe, of heaven and earth, is clear from many texts. (Miller 2000, 600)

It is this Council that each of the prophets met. Jeremiah recognized the false prophets were a group of people who had not had any meeting such as that. They appointed themselves.

Jeremiah 23:17–18 "They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, 'It shall be well with you'; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No disaster shall come upon you.' For who among them has stood in the council of the LORD to see and to hear his word, or who has paid attention to his word and listened?" (ESV)

Let's listen in to a meeting.

## 1 Kings 22:19–23

"And Micaiah said, "Therefore, hear the word of the LORD. I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the angels of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left. And the LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one spirit said this, while another said that. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, and said, 'I will entice him.' And the LORD said to him, 'How?'



And he said, 'I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all his prophets.' Then He said, 'You shall entice him, and you will also prevail. Go and do so.' Now then, behold, the LORD has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours; and the LORD has declared disaster against you."" (NASB 2020)

We see that there is a specific pattern for someone to be a prophet or prophetess. There were many more who do not have books named after them such as Elijah or Elisha, but they went through the same interview process. False prophets though became a serious problem.

#### Jeremiah 14:13-16

"Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD, look! The prophets are saying to them, 'You won't see the sword and you won't experience famine. Rather, I'll give you lasting peace in this place.' " Then the LORD told me, "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I didn't send them, I didn't command them, and I didn't speak to them. They're proclaiming to you false visions, worthless predictions, and the delusions of their own minds. Therefore, this is what the LORD says about the false prophets who prophesy in my name, 'There will be no sword and famine in this land' (though I haven't sent them): 'By the sword and by famine these prophets will be finished off! The people to whom they have prophesied will be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword. There will be no one to bury them, their wives, their sons, or their daughters. I'll pour out on them the judgment they deserve.' "" (ISV)

To be a prophet does not necessarily mean that you will be talking about future events. This is the same today with the New Testament gift of prophecy. It is more about communicating the mind of Christ. But what about our understanding of this word?

"A "prophet," in modern popular usage, means predominately one who foretells the future—who predicts events which could be only known to him by miraculous revelation. By the "argument from prophecy" is usually meant the evidence for the Divine origin of Christianity, derived from the foreknowledge exhibited by the prophets of the Old Testament. But this argument requires a careful restatement if it is to stand the light of modern criticism. The definite announcement of events yet distant is but a small, a subordinate, and an unessential part of the prophet's mission." (Farrar n.d., 3)

In the Old Testament, there is a full realization on the part of the prophet that when they speak for God, there is a Biblical standard that is followed. They must be right, 100% of the time all the time.

## Deuteronomy 18:20-22

"But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name, a word which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' And if you say in your heart, 'How will we recognize the word which the LORD has not spoken?' When the prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, and the thing does not happen or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you are not to be afraid of him." (NASB 2020)

In Israel, saying you are a prophet, and you aren't, carried the death penalty (Deuteronomy 13:5).

I am asked about prophetic utterances taking place today frequently. We no longer put false prophets to death, we leave the issue up to the Lord to handle. But if someone says they are telling you something that will happen, and it doesn't, they are a false prophet.

If someone says they have special knowledge, run.

It does not matter how popular the book was or how many television shows they appeared on, or how snazzy their web site is, they're a false prophet...ignore them. Peter warned about them.

## 2 Peter 2:1-3

"But there were also false prophets in Israel, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will cleverly teach destructive heresies and even deny the Master who bought them. In this way, they will



bring sudden destruction on themselves. Many will follow their evil teaching and shameful immorality. And because of these teachers, the way of truth will be slandered. In their greed they will make up clever lies to get hold of your money. But God condemned them long ago, and their destruction will not be delayed." (NLT)

We have the same problem today that Jeremiah had back in Jeremiah 14.

The pattern we see in the Old Testament, and we saw it over and over again in Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, is this. There will be a prophecy made regarding something that will take place in the very near future. This is a validation prophecy. "Criteria by which to distinguish true from false prophets included the logical consistency of teaching with previous revelation (Dt 13:1–5) and the verification of visible signs (Dt 18:20–22)." (Lewis 2007, 1823)

After the prophet had been validated, then would come the prophecies that go further into the future. Dealing with things we have not even seen take place today and are still waiting for.

Isaiah - And this is not all, but one example.

- Validation Isaiah 7:1 9, Syria and the Northern Kingdom will not destroy you King Ahaz.
- Near Isaiah 7:17, Assyria will become a headache for King Ahaz.
- Far Isaiah 9:1 7, the King is coming the first time and the second time.

The thing that made one a prophet was not that he was foretelling the future, but that he was speaking the word of God as the Spirit directed him. (Jenkins 1989, 3)

They were "messengers of Jehovah" (Hag. 1:13), "men of God" (1 Sam. 2:27), "men of the Spirit" (Hos. 9:7). (Farrar n.d., 8)

When the prophets spoke on moral issues, they always delivered their messages in view of the Mosaic law and people's fidelity or infidelity to it. The primary concern was to heal a rupture of the covenant with God and his people. There are also frequent references to the promised Messiah who would come to subdue all the nations, establish justice, bring all peoples under the covenant and judge their deeds. The judgment and standards of conduct are especially hard on the Hebrews precisely because they were expected to be a light to the nations. Thus they could not claim ignorance of their relation to the one true God. (Ferreiro 2003, xix)

We will see that the major issue, sin, is not a new one. It is accompanied by a failure in loyalty to the one true God whom the entire nation had professed loyalty to at Mount Sinai.

A contract was established, and the conditions of the contract were laid out in great detail to include benefits if the contract were followed as well as penalties for failure.

The blessings and cursings were detailed by Moses and Joshua and then pointed to by the prophets. The intent was to call the nation to repentance.

The call that we will see repeated throughout these 12 books is the call to repent. "Everything you always needed to know about repentance can be found in the Minor Prophets. They give us the definition, the incentives, and the methods to induce repentance as well as even the attitudes which prevented it." (Blackford 1989, 77)

#### Amos 5:4

"For this is what the LORD says to the house of Israel: "Seek Me so that you may live." (NASB 2020)



## Malachi 3:7

""From the days of your fathers you have turned away from My statutes and have not kept them. **Return to Me**, and I will return to you," says the LORD of armies. "But you say, 'How shall we return?" (NASB 2020)

## Jonah 3:5–9

"Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he got up from his throne, removed his robe from himself, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat on the dust. And he issued a proclamation, and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: No person, animal, herd, or flock is to taste anything. They are not to eat, or drink water. But every person and animal must be covered with sackcloth; and people are to call on God vehemently, **and they are to turn, each one from his evil way, and from the violence which is in their hands**. Who knows, God may turn and relent, and turn from His burning anger so that we will not perish."" (NASB 2020)

#### Zechariah 1:2-3

""The LORD was very angry with your fathers. Therefore say to them, 'This is what the LORD of armies says: "**Return to Me**," declares the LORD of armies, "that I may return to you," says the LORD of armies." (NASB 2020)

The call to repentance issued by the prophets is a call that still goes out across the world today.

The dominant characteristics of the repentance preached by the prophets is a vigorous decisiveness regarding one's obligation to God. It is a complete and resolute return to Yahweh from whom the sinner has strayed, and it is a decisive break with sin. Repentance is the "opposite of sin. It is the act by which the sinner who has disobeyed the will of God reverses his will and comes back with sorrow from the state of rebellion to the state of obedience" (Knox, Wilfred L.. Penitence and forgiveness. London:Talbott Press 1953, 25). (Blackford 1989, 77)

At the core of the Old Testament theology of repentance is the relational dimension. The change in relationship is often explicitly expressed as a shift from a foreign god or gods to Yahweh. While this may have a behavioural aspect to it, such as destroying or abandoning one's idols, it is the relational shift that is key as the person or people exchange their relationship with one deity or deities for a relationship with Yahweh. (Boda 2015, 145)

Isaiah went into great detail to discuss the problem with false gods and the need to repent from following them. When examined from the perspective of YAHWEH, the fallen members of the heavenly host, fallen divine beings who are impersonating gods, are beings that He created and have rebelled against His authority. This all began when one of them said, "I will be like the most high." Then that member of the Heavenly Host, Lucifer, engaged in active rebellion. Yes, they have free will too.

#### Isaiah 14:13-14

"You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." (ESV)

This rebel, Lucifer, then lied to others convincing them to join him in rebellion, Adam, Eve and then other members of the heavenly host. By convincing Adam and Eve to rebel, he also became a mass murderer responsible for the death of billions.

We tend to think of that episode primarily in human terms. That's understandable, since the fall affected the entirety of the human race. But behind the decisions of Adam and Eve to violate God's command about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, there was another created being, supernatural in nature, who had decided his own will was preeminent. (Heiser, Demons: What the Bible Really Says about the Powers of Darkness 2020, 61-62)



There was then another rebellion we read about in Genesis 6. Then man again rejected what God wanted for them in Genesis 11. This resulted in God divorcing man at Babel and giving them to members of the Divine Council to be administrators over them. Those Divine Council members then rebelled and began to demand worship for those they were charged to oversee. God chose Abram as His.

## Deuteronomy 32:8-9

"The Most High assigned nations their lands; he determined where peoples should live. He assigned to each nation a heavenly being, but Jacob's descendants he chose for himself." (GNB)

#### Psalm 82:1-2

"God presides in the heavenly council; in the assembly of the gods he gives his decision: "You must stop judging unjustly; you must no longer be partial to the wicked!" (GNB)

Later He says they will die like men. God has already beaten them through what Christ did on the cross. Every time a member of God's people opted to worship a false god; they were worshipping a fallen created being who was in rebellion to the God of the universe. The Jew's had pledged allegiance to the Lord who desired to work through them to reach the nations He had divorced. They failed.

While Israel is condemned for worshiping the sun, moon, and stars, there is no indication in the Old Testament that the sons of God allotted to the nations at Babel were "fallen" (i.e., adversaries of Yahweh) when that assignment took place. While the allotment and its punishment context are clear, the Old Testament never indicates that Yahweh was pleased when the allotted sons of God were worshiped. If he had intended the nations to worship the sons of God allotted to them, there would ostensibly be no reason for such worship to offend God. They would be doing what God expected. (Heiser, Demons: What the Bible Really Says about the Powers of Darkness 2020, 151)

## Repentance is the Theme

So, for the nation that went in rebellion after those idols, the false gods who could not even answer a basic challenge given to them by YAHWEH to tell the future. Repentance is needed.

Isaiah 41:22-24

"Come here and predict what will happen, so that we will know it when it takes place. Explain to the court the events of the past, and tell us what they mean. Tell us what the future holds— then we will know that you are gods! Do something good or bring some disaster; fill us with fear and awe! You and all you do are nothing; those who worship you are disgusting!" (GNB)

Repentance is still needed today. Repentance is a change in behavior, it is agreeing with God about who we really are and how much we truly need the redemption that only He provides through Jesus Christ to bring us back into relationship with Him.

"Repentance is an essential part of the Christian gospel message. It lies at the core of the proclamation of John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, the disciples in the Gospels and the apostles in the early church. Consistent with the Old Testament witness, the New Testament defines repentance as a fundamental return to covenant relationship with the triune God. Repentance is the required response of both Jew and Gentile since all humanity is related to God through the covenant made with Noah in Genesis 9 and since we are all made in God's image (Gen. 1). This return to covenant relationship with the triune God 2015, 192-193)

Where do we start? By agreeing with His assessment and simply believing.

## Romans 10:8–10

"What it says is this: "God's message is near you, on your lips and in your heart"—that is, the message of faith that we preach. If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from death, you



will be saved. For it is by our faith that we are put right with God; it is by our confession that we are saved." (GNB)

# ABC's of Salvation

- A. Acknowledge that you are a sinner, tell Him that.
- B. Believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sin and that He rose from the dead.
- C. Confess that Jesus is Lord. Tell someone about what you have done.

As we start next time by examining the book of Hosea, we will see God giving His people a last opportunity to repent.

2 Kings 17:13–14

"The LORD solemnly warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and all the seers, "Turn back from your evil ways; obey my commandments and rules that are recorded in the law. I ordered your ancestors to keep this law and sent my servants the prophets to remind you of its demands." But they did not pay attention and were as stubborn as their ancestors, who had not trusted the LORD their God." (NET)

By the time we get to Malachi, the nation is about to begin 400 years of silence. The first words they will hear after that silence are the words of John the Baptist...repent. As a result of what is about to come, God uses Malachi to give the nation and the leadership incentive to repent. He begins by telling them how much He loves the people of Israel. The need to repent and to get serious about worship are outlined.

And the last word to His people before Jesus arrives...one more incentive to repent...

Malachi 4:5–6

"Look, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD arrives. He will encourage fathers and their children to return to me, so that I will not come and strike the earth with judgment."" (NET)

Next week we start with the book of Hosea.

So here is the question...you have been praying for the Lord to point you to the right person to do life with...and the Lord personally answers. Hosea said yes, would we?



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