

LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

ANALYZING THE APPLICABILITY OF PREACHING THE MINOR  
PROPHETS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

A Thesis Project Submitted to  
Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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## DEDICATION

To my wife and daughters, Makeba, Shayna and Breanna, God only knows how much I love and appreciate you. Thank you for your love, encouragement and patience through more than 20 years of study, which culminated in this DMIN project.

To Dr. Lynda Byrd Logan, your encouragement and thought provoking critique has compelled me to strive for excellence as a Christian and a biblically and academically sound student.

## ABSTRACT

### ANALYZING THE APPLICABILITY OF PREACHING THE MINOR PROPHETS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011

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In this writer's estimation too many preachers have deemed the prophetic and eschatological Scriptures irrelevant, controversial and hard for preachers to understand as well as confusing for the average church member to grasp. Furthermore, many preachers seem to favor preaching and teaching the New Testament in contrast to the Old Testament. Seemingly, the emphasis today is on evangelism and contemporary issues of life. Consequently, these concerns have caused many to completely avoid or sparingly discuss the book of Revelation, many of the major Old Testament prophetic books and equally as important the Minor Prophets.

Understandably, it is the aim of this project to encourage and awaken the evangelical community to the importance, relevance and applicability of the Minor Prophets in the 21st Century. Such a study will reveal the cohesiveness of the Minor Prophets with the whole of Scripture; the mandate to preach the whole Bible; and an explicit declaration of the impact of these books upon the unfolding of history and the personal and spiritual lives of both the preacher and the congregant.

Initially, a clear description of the problem will be given. Ample attention shall be placed on understanding the rationale for preaching certain subjects, the impact of the preacher's style on the subjects chosen and the preference for preaching from the New

Testament rather than the Old Testament. Likewise, counterarguments will be leveraged upon these rationales in favor of preaching from the Minor Prophets proportionately. In a broad perspective, select portions of the Minor Prophets will be analyzed to clarify their effectiveness and relevancy to contemporary issues in the lives of people. Similarly, select eschatological implications in the Minor Prophets will be analyzed, which exposes the lucid, relevant and imminent nature of the Minor Prophets. Overall, underlying this theoretical study, a theological and practical approach to understanding and preaching the Minor Prophets will emerge.

Abstract length: 307 words

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction to An Analysis of Preaching the Minor Prophets Project

Forcefully and directly addressing a constantly changing populace with the unchanging and authoritative Word of God has become one of the greatest challenges facing pastors. While facing this challenge economical, political and social problems along with pluralism and moral decay are destroying America. Similarly, the evangelical community, at a time when the world needs most the truth contained only in God's Word, is busy fighting worship wars, solving problems of sexual infidelity and financial debauchery among pastors and managing enormous administrative tasks. Many pastors are misinterpreting, inadequately conveying and improperly applying the Bible. Worst of all, many develop and deliver sermons in America, which center on relevance and not on the Bible.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, much of the Bible is not preached and whole books of the Bible are considered irrelevant. Consequently, though not to minimize the importance of any book of the Bible, this project suggests the Minor Prophets are indisputably applicable to the struggles of this day as well as the times of the Old Testament prophets.

Unfortunately, much of the Old Testament and many of the Minor Prophets are not being preached and taught. Pastors deem these books too controversial, hard to understand and irrelevant. Consequently, Walter Kaiser rhetorically asks, "Why do so many pastors admit to having a mental block, feelings of inadequacy or plain guilt when

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<sup>1</sup> Albert R. Mohler, *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 19-20.

it comes to preaching the Old Testament?”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in this age of information overflow amid a narcissistic culture, many pastors prefer to preach and teach what the people want to hear; if the congregant wants a message that only engages his or her emotions many will accommodate them. In fact, Richard Mayhue identifies the concern in these terms, “What the people want, the church should provide. What the church provides, pastors should be trained to deliver.”<sup>3</sup> Perhaps, large facilities and enormous budgets have been equated with spiritual success. Pastors in search of and desirous of sustaining such success are provoked to preach simple, emotionally driven and lack of biblical content messages.

Regrettably, this writer has experienced far too much neglect of the authoritative Word of God. As an African American, his worship experience as a child, while attending a National Baptist Convention church, includes much emotion, very few sermons from the Old Testament, fragmented topical style preaching and primarily salvation oriented messages. As an adult, growing as a disciple and attending a number of conservative churches over 25 years, this writer did not hear anyone preach expositively through any of the Minor Prophets. Furthermore, one pastor admittedly avoids preaching the books of Revelation and Daniel and any other book or passage with similar content. This pastor chooses to preach a simple salvation message, because in his estimation reaching the lost is more important. He further asserts apocalyptic texts are problematic and too hard to explain; in fact, he gives an unbiblical and very capricious

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<sup>2</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1981), 201.

<sup>3</sup> Richard L. Mayhue, “Rediscovering Expository Preaching,” *Masters Seminary Journal* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 50-51.

answer to this writer and others in a discussion about dispensationalism and a number of other minor end times' concepts.

Though controversial, the shallow, relevancy driven and conversational preaching of many church growth pioneers or leading mega-church pastors has influenced the need to awaken and inform the evangelical community about its downward spiral away from sound Biblical preaching. Though evangelical in theology, Bill Hybels, Rick Warren, Andy Stanley and many others are among the leading advocates of various preaching styles, worship philosophies and church growth principles, which have inundated the evangelical community with a seeker-sensitive, non-threatening and Biblically sterile approach to preaching. Andy Stanley's bold assertions indicate an immediate concern in evangelicalism; in his book, *Communicate for a Change*, the narrator in the most graphic and persuasive story-telling manner leads the reader on a journey, which ultimately reveals many major problems with Andy Stanley's philosophy of preaching. He asserts preaching is entertainment; in addition, Andy Stanley argues the audience is more important than the biblical text; and unfortunately, he suggests expository preaching focuses on too many details, which are not relevant to the audience and is of no concern to them.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, Bill Hybels, who has spent over 25 years encouraging seeker-sensitive worship principles, wants to warn advocates of the Emergent Church Movement not to abandon solid Biblical teaching; in fact, he admits his approach to ministry, preaching and teaching has produced an immature body of disciples.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Andy Stanley and Lane Jones, *Communicating for a Change* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Publishers, 2006), 61, 92, 96, 119.

<sup>5</sup> Bob Burney, "A Shocking 'Confession' from Willow Creek Community Church," Crosswalk.com, October 30, 2007. <http://www.crosswalk.com/pastors/11558438> (accessed 8/2/2010).

Given this writer's experience, lack of hearing sermons from the Minor Prophets and the strong emphasis of preaching simplistic and relevancy oriented messages, the alarm has to be sounded. The evangelical community has to be shaken from its sleep. Though one should not discard certain church growth principles and other innovative ideas in a wholesale fashion, sound exposition of the Word of God has to be embraced. In that regard, this research project will study the homiletical philosophies and principles that directly relate to the lack of preaching and teaching from the Minor Prophets. Hypothetically, this project will demonstrate the relevancy and applicability of the Minor Prophets in the 21st Century. Indubitably, the one who faithfully studies the Minor Prophets will agree with Dr. James Montgomery Boice, amid the eternal rough of diamonds the Minor Prophets emerge as timely, relevant and forceful messages. Dr. Boice writes, "These works were powerful. They spoke to present sins and called for present actions."<sup>6</sup>

## **Statement of the Problem**

### Preamble to the Problem Statement

Are the Minor Prophets applicable to the problems and issues of people living in the 21st Century? If so, why does it appear that preachers rarely preach or teach from the Minor Prophets? In that regard, it will be the aim of this project to analyze why the Minor Prophets are not being preached and taught, confirm the suspicion that the Minor Prophets are rarely preached, to examine the relevancy of eschatological concepts in the

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<sup>6</sup> James M. Boice, *The Minor Prophets: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 1:9.

Minor Prophets as well as to explore the impact of “relevancy-oriented” preaching upon the issue.

### Sub-Problems

In attempting to address this problem, the applicability of the Minor Prophets, many subordinate and complementary issues emerge, but only three of the most crucial issues will be addressed. First, this project will explore some of the reasons why the Minor Prophets are not preached and taught. Similarly, the impact of “relevancy-oriented” preaching will be explored. Fundamentally, this style of preaching reflects the infiltration of recent church growth practices, which many pastors have integrated into their philosophy of ministry. Lastly, given the complexity of understanding eschatological concepts and the vast emphasis on these concepts in the Minor Prophets, this project will analyze the applicability and relevance of eschatological passages upon the lives of people.

### Hypothesis

This project will solidify the essentiality of a Biblical premise and encourage pastors to preach and teach proportionately from the Minor Prophets. Namely, it will suggest in agreement with the words of the Apostle Paul in II Tim. 3:16, all Scripture “is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction” and “for instruction in righteousness”. Preferably, the evangelical community will conclude, the Minor Prophets are relevant and applicable to the issues of contemporary congregants and should be preached in proportion to the other books of the Bible.

## Project Scope

Given the enormity of the Old Testament text, the size of the Minor Prophets and the innumerable opinions and approaches to preaching and teaching, the scope of this project will be limited. The primary objective of this project will be to analyze the crucial concepts that will sustain the premise that the Minor Prophets are relevant and should be preached and taught in proportion to the other books of the Bible. As the research is conducted eschatological implications and “relevancy-oriented” preaching are the only two areas that will be evaluated thoroughly. Though other concepts are important and some will be evaluated to some extent this project will not involve thoroughly researching and analyzing them. For example, one could argue that African Americans, liberals and pastors of certain denominations preach fewer sermons from the Minor Prophets than white conservative expositors; however, this project will not address that concern.

Furthermore, there are a number of theological issues that will not be thoroughly addressed in this project, if at all. Though there are a plethora of books and articles which defend the premise, one can preach Christ from the Old Testament, this project will not involve an exhaustive study of this theme. Similarly, this project will not be a comprehensive and instructional explanation about the tenets and distinctions of covenant theology or dispensationalism; thus, continuity and discontinuity will not be addressed.

Also, this project will limit its emphasis upon explaining certain homiletical and church growth concepts. Certainly, many implications from these crucial areas of ministry will be peripherally implied; however, they will not be analyzed in detail. In fact, effort will not be leveraged upon explaining in survey style homiletical and church

growth principles. Though one's style of preaching has a lot to do with one's choice of passage to preach and teach, this project will not evaluate the many styles of preaching; conversely, it will consider "conversational" and "relevancy-oriented" preaching, which are not well defined styles; yet these styles will be evaluated because of their recent impact upon the evangelical community and their emphasis on relevancy; theoretically, this writer deductively associates the cry for relevance with the need to avoid preaching and teaching certain passages. Furthermore, this project will not define, defend or disprove the church growth principles one associates with reaching postmodernists; however, this project will interact with the principles of this movement, which directly relate to preaching.

### Assumptions

This project will assume the reader embraces the doctrine of inerrancy. It presupposes the reader appreciates a grammatical historical approach to interpreting the Bible. Furthermore, this project will expect the reader to be familiar with expository and topical preaching. Given these assumptions, minimal or no emphasis will be placed on explaining in detail these doctrinal tenets and preaching styles. Nevertheless, given the nature of this project and a counterargument against conversational style preaching, Andy Stanley's style, expository preaching will be an underlying factor; in fact, contrary to Andy Stanley's argument, this project will assume expository preaching is a style of preaching that seeks to convey the message in a life-changing and relevant manner.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Stanley and Jones, 97,102, 112-113.



## Definition of Terms

Usage of the term “expository preaching” in this project will imply an understanding of the principles conveyed in Haddon Robinson’s definition of expository preaching; he writes, “Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, this project will indirectly imply that expository preaching assumes accurate hermeneutical principles, the power of God at work in the preacher, the communication and translation of the original author’s intent as well as an appropriate application.

Two additional terms that will be used in this project are “relevancy-oriented” and “conversational” style preaching. Both terms are not recognizable preaching styles; however, they will be addressed as preaching styles in this project, because they most accurately reflect the overarching intentions or perspectives of those who use these styles. In this project “relevancy oriented” preaching will refer to preaching and teaching, which may neglect the context of the Bible and the original author’s intent to address contemporary issues in a relevant manner. Such a method, does not teach congregants the Bible, but stresses application and relevancy of the Bible. Similarly, Andy Stanley’s approach, “conversational style preaching”, adds to relevancy-oriented preaching a communications aspect; he argues that the preacher has to speak in a conversational voice; and Andy Stanley determines the audience and relevancy are more important in

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<sup>8</sup> Robinson Haddon, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1980), 19-20.

sermon preparation and communication of the sermon than the context of the Bible.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, references to “conversational style preaching” in this project will be understood to be Andy Stanley’s preaching style.

The phrase “nine basic Bible doctrines” will be used in this project. Its usage will allude to the nine doctrines Emery Nester identifies and defines; he writes:

- Theology is the study of God and His attributes, including His triune nature.
- Christology is the doctrine of Christ, including His divine and human natures, as well as His work on the cross on behalf of humanity.
- Pneumatology is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, including his nature and His operation in the church and the world.
- Bibliology is the doctrine of Scripture, including its inspiration and authority.
- Anthropology is the doctrine of humanity (man).
- Hamartiology is the doctrine of sin.
- Soteriology is the doctrine of salvation.
- Angelology is the doctrine of angels, including Satan and demons.
- Eschatology is the doctrine of last things, including the return of Christ and the ultimate destiny of individuals.<sup>10</sup>

### **Theoretical Basis**

Preaching proportionately from the Minor Prophets is practical, biblical, theological and historical. The task of preaching is practical, because it involves interpreting the Biblical text, drawing relevant and practical teachings from the biblical text and communicating the results; thus, engaging any biblical text, including the Minor Prophets, is practical. Similarly, the pastor’s perspective of preaching works in accord and impacts many of the other practical aspects of ministry; hence, one’s preaching,

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<sup>9</sup> Stanley and Jones, 97,102, 119-121, 133.

<sup>10</sup> Emery Nester, “Introduction to Doctrine, Theological Hierarchy (Session 49),” Bible.org. <http://bible.org/print/book/export/html/4438> (accessed September 8, 2010).

teaching, choice of biblical text, voice and other dynamics often reflects one's philosophy of leadership, counseling and church growth principles.

Though not to suggest a pastor must preach expository messages from any of the Minor Prophets within a given period of time, it seems appropriate, biblical and theological for pastors not to exclude or purposefully minimize the importance of preaching the Minor Prophets. In fact, Paul's counsel to Timothy suggests, "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" and all Scripture "is profitable" for instructing and teaching God's people; furthermore, in agreement with Paul's statement, Jesus in Matt. 5:17 defends the verbal and plenary inspiration as well as the certainty of its fulfillment by saying, "all will be fulfilled." Consequently, the Minor Prophets are included in the use of the word "all", which implies through deductive reasoning one should in proportion to preaching from the other books of the Bible preach from the Minor Prophets.

Lastly, preaching from the Minor Prophets involves both past and future history. The content of the Minor Prophets suggests Israel's past history is important. Similarly, the judgments, punishments and restoration of Israel, which many of the Minor Prophets describe, suggest history is continuing to be unfolded. As a result, preaching and teaching from the Minor Prophets involve engaging the past, looking forward to the future and finding hope, work and direction for the present.

## **Statement of Methodology**

### Research Methodology

This project will involve a theoretical study of an issue in ministry. In that regard, the outcome will not be a conference, a newsletter or a handbook; however, the intrinsic nature of preaching and teaching will imply its practicality in a ministry setting. Furthermore, this project will present evidence that there is a problem in the evangelical community with the lack of preaching from the Old Testament and most importantly the Minor Prophets. A minimum of ten notable pastors' sermon text will be evaluated to determine how frequent sermons are preached from the Minor Prophets. In fact, a brief survey of John Piper's sermons online reveals that he only preached two sermons from the book of Micah within the last five years and one sermon from the book of Micah during the five year period prior to 2005.<sup>11</sup>

Given this understanding, the research will be primarily bibliographic; thus, this project will seek to answer the following questions – “Are the Minor Prophets applicable and effectual for preaching relevant, engaging and life-changing messages? If so, why are they not preached?” Similarly, three secondary concepts will be studied, the pastor's choice of text, eschatological implications and postmodernism.

Initially, effort will be focused upon solidifying the biblical and theological basis for suggesting the Minor Prophets are relevant and should be preached in proportion to the other books of the Bible. Secondly, the research will involve analyzing and evaluating current trends in preaching with the objective of discerning how pastors select the text they will preach. Furthermore, the postmodernist movement will be researched to

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<sup>11</sup> John Piper, “Resource Library: Sermons by Scripture,” Desiring God. <http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/> (accessed September 29, 2010).

determine and evaluate its impact upon the pastor's preaching style and choice of text.

Along with the results of this research, effort will be placed on identifying and evaluating the main reasons why the Minor Prophets are not preached?

In view of achieving the thesis, counterarguments will be leveraged against the objections for not preaching the Minor Prophets. Similarly, select Minor Prophets, eschatological implications and the nine basic Bible doctrines shall be studied with the objective of determining their applicability and force upon contemporary issues. In the end, an approach to planning and preaching the Minor Prophets will emerge.

### Summary of Chapters

Chapter one will introduce the reader to the project. A brief explanation for why the writer chose this topic will be discussed. Similarly, this chapter will include a problem statement with supporting sub-problems and a thoroughly written section on the scope and limitations of this project. It will also include discussions about the assumptions and key terms, which will assist the reader with understanding the content and objectives of the project.

The "Biblical and Theological Foundations'" chapter, chapter two, will provide the reader with biblical and theological support for preaching the Minor Prophets. II Timothy 3:16, Matthew 5:17 and other passages of Scripture will be used to clarify the necessity of preaching proportionately from the Minor Prophets. It will solidify and synthesize the importance and necessity of this study with the doctrine of inspiration and the continuity of the whole of Scripture.

Chapters three and four will reflect the preponderance of the research. They will engage the question – “Why are the Minor Prophets neglected?” Chapter three will examine current trends in preaching to determine why and how pastors select passages to preach; particular emphasis on “conversational” and “relevancy-oriented” preaching styles shall be included. Given recent emphasis on reaching postmodernists and its impact upon many pastor’s philosophy of ministry, chapter three will briefly describe the postmodernist movement and examine its perspective on preaching. Similarly, chapter four will provide an analysis of two reasons for the Minor Prophets not being preached as consistently as other books. In the end, chapter four will present counterarguments in support of preaching from the Minor Prophets in proportion to preaching from the other books of the Bible.

Proving the thesis shall be the objective of chapter five. In specific and practical terms this chapter will expose the reader to the relevance and applicability of the books of Amos, Malachi and Zephaniah to the lives of people today. Similarly, this chapter will expose pastors to the bearing of eschatological implications within the Minor Prophets upon all of history. Lastly, this chapter will illustrate how the nine basic Bible doctrines can be taught from the Minor Prophets.

Chapters six will involve suggesting an approach or guidelines for planning and preaching the Minor Prophets. The aim of this chapter will be to recommend a way to ensure the Minor Prophets are included in the pastor’s choice of text.

The final chapter will consist of a summary of the project’s aims. It shall include possible courses of action. In addition, this chapter will elaborate upon the value and

impact of this study. The writer's reflection of the value of this project as well as its impact upon the evangelical community shall be articulated.

### Project Outline

- I. Introduction: A description of the design and process for completing the project.
- II. Biblical and Theological Foundations: This section conveys evidence of biblical and theological support.
  - A. Provide biblical support for preaching the Minor Prophets.
  - B. Provide theological support for preaching the Minor Prophets.
- III. An analysis and rationale about – why the Minor Prophets are neglected.
  - A. A general introduction to the Minor Prophets and the issue of - why are these books rarely preached.
  - B. Identify and analyze the current trends on preaching, which directly impact the pastor's choice of text.
  - C. Introduce and analyze the postmodernist movement and its impact on preaching styles and choice of text.
- IV. Identify and present key reasons why the Minor Prophets are not preached as well as counterarguments to disprove or weaken the objections.
  - A. Identify and evaluate key reasons why the Minor Prophets are not preached.
    1. The New Testament versus the Old Testament
    2. The complexity of understanding prophetic passages, which includes eschatological implications
  - B. Present counterarguments to disprove or weaken objections for not preaching the Minor Prophets.
- V. Relevance and Applicability of Select Minor Prophets to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century church.
  - A. Prove the thesis by identifying and relating key issues addressed in the book of Amos to contemporary issues.
  - B. Prove the thesis by identifying and relating key issues addressed in the book of Malachi to contemporary issues.
  - C. Prove the thesis by identifying and relating key issues addressed in the book of Zephaniah to contemporary issues.
  - D. Prove the thesis by identifying eschatological implications in the Minor Prophets; and by clarifying their imminent impact upon all of history.
  - E. Prove the thesis by identifying and articulating how the nine basic Bible doctrines can be taught from the Minor Prophets.
- VI. Recommend an approach to planning and preaching from the Minor Prophets proportionately.

VII. Reflect on the impact and value of preaching the Minor Prophets coupled with a Conclusion.

- A. Reflect on the impact of preaching the Minor Prophets.
- B. Reflect on the value of this project upon preachers in the evangelical community as well as its value to the writer.
- C. Summarize the aim of the project, whether achieved and possible courses of actions; similarly, recommend topics for additional study.

Appendix A: Sample lessons from the book of Amos

Appendix B: Sample sermon from the book of Zephaniah

Appendix C: Sample sermon from the book of Malachi

## **Literature Review**

### Introduction

In light of the lack of direct, recent and complete research on encouraging pastors to embrace the applicability and relevance of the Minor Prophets, this literature review will reflect a thorough and an extensive evaluation of sources, which are indirectly and intimately related to the topic. Overall, the research will involve dissertations, magazine articles, journal articles, commentaries and a reasonable number of books primarily on preaching and postmodernism.

Though much research has not been conducted on why the Minor Prophets are not preached, there are a number of sources that admit the neglect of the Minor Prophets. In contrast, recent research and dialogue about concerns with preaching, what to preach, how to communicate the message and how to make the sermon relevant are innumerable. Much of this discussion seems to be provoked by concerns with reaching postmodernists; thus, in quite argumentative language, books, magazine articles and journal articles are inundating the evangelical community with dialogue in support of ministry practices to reach postmodernists, warnings against these practices and a variation of other



perspectives. This exchange of ideas suggests sermons must be relevant to contemporary congregants, preached in appropriate style and language and may or may not stress contextual usage of the biblical text. Consequently, this dialogue indirectly explains some of the current concerns with why the Minor Prophets are not preached.

Given the vast amount of information available, it seems appropriate to identify and describe the most important sources for this project. The sources are not listed by their importance, date of publication or origin; however, they are broken up into areas of emphasis which coincide with the crucial areas of the research. The three primary areas are direct sources, postmodernism and preaching styles and approaches. The sources under the direct source subheading will reflect works that seem to focus specifically on why the Minor Prophets are not preached. The list of postmodernism sources is not exhaustive, but it contains enough principal sources to define postmodernism and its impact on why the Minor Prophets are not preached. The sources on preaching styles and approaches will involve works which primarily address the preacher's rationale for preaching from one book of the Bible over another or one passage of Scripture over another; hence, deductively the research shall focus on the homiletical dynamics pertaining to the issue. Lastly, the fourth area of sources will identify a number of the most significant commentaries on the Minor Prophets.

#### Sources Directly Addressing the Problem

Given the titles and the authors' purposes for writing the sources below, it seems plausible to ascertain what they add to the body of research; thus, the following is a

summary of the sources that seem to directly address the lack of preaching from the Minor Prophets:

1. Kim-Sin Yap - “Handbook on Teaching and Preaching of Joel and Malachi Complemented by a Daily Devotional” is a DMIN project which suggests the Minor Prophets are neglected; however, this project focuses on improving a specific congregation’s knowledge of Joel and Malachi. Members of the church are evaluated to see how much has been retained; similarly, the members’ appreciation for the relevancy of the Minor Prophets is assessed.

2. Elizabeth Achtemeier - *Preaching from the Minor Prophets* sparsely presents practical help for the expositor. It identifies the problem, lack of preaching from the Minor Prophets, and it briefly addresses it. In addition, it provides rather brief comments about each book’s historical background, sermon ideas and theological concerns; thus, it indirectly suggests the Minor Prophets are relevant to contemporary congregants. Actually, it is too brief to be of much help to the serious expositor.

3. John Stevenson - *Preaching from the Minor Prophets: To a Postmodern Congregation* seems to contain research used to teach a seminary class. Its specific objective is to make the Minor Prophets relevant to postmodernists. This rather brief book identifies the issue, the lack of preaching from the Minor Prophet, but it does not effectively and thoroughly address the homiletical concerns. In fact, it references the brief treatment of the issue in Elizabeth Achtemeier’s book and two reasons why the Minor Prophets are not preached. Nevertheless, it seems to be more focused on illustrating the practical rather than in a balanced perspective conveying the practical along with a thorough understanding of how and why the Minor Prophets are not

preached; however, the book's overall objective is not to prove the relevance of the Minor Prophets to issues people are facing today. It does contain a very lucid and interesting historical examination of the Minor Prophets' usage of select early church fathers, reformers and contemporary preachers. Despite the reformed biases, unsubstantiated comments about dispensationalists and the brevity of the discussion centered on this project's thesis, this book provides pastors with practical help in regards to reaching postmodernists through preaching the Minor Prophets.

4. Donald A. Leggett - *Loving God and Disturbing Men: Preaching from the Prophets* is a unique work that discusses why and how to preach the prophetic books of the Bible. Interestingly, many of the discussions are centered on the Minor Prophets. Similarly, this book offers a unique survey or broad expositional comments on three of the Minor Prophets. Equally as important, this book identifies and substantiates the value of many other sources, which will enhance one's preaching from the prophets.

#### Sources on Postmodernism

In search of understanding whether the Minor Prophets are relevant to contemporary congregants, reaching postmodernist seems to emerge. Understandably, the postmodernist movement has much to say about what and how the preacher conveys his message; thus, the following is a summary of the primary sources this project will engage:

1. Millard J. Erickson – *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Post Modernism* is a brief but crucial treatment of the subject. It is not the most recent book on the subject, but the author's approach in writing it lends itself to

understanding the movement as well as it provides constructive discussion about its impacts upon the culture. The first section of the book is dedicated to defining postmodernism along with modernism. The following sections involve three scholars' negative responses to postmodernism and four scholars' positive responses to the issue. The final chapter summarizes Millard Erickson's perspective on the matter. As a result, this book engages rationales for the necessity of relevancy-oriented preaching, while exposing strengths, weaknesses and concerns that pertain to theology, philosophies of ministry and homiletics.

2. Scott M. Gibson – *Preaching to a Shifting Culture: 12 Perspectives on Communicating that Connects* discusses concerns with preaching in a changing culture. Effectively, it addresses the Old Testament, expository preaching, the audience, relevancy and the authority of the Bible. Though it does not endorse many of the beliefs and methods some use to reach postmodernist, it recognizes the culture is changing and suggests conservative homiletical practices.

3. Graham Johnston – *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-first Century Listeners* exposes the preacher to the ideologies and expectancies of the postmodernist. It identifies and attempts to offer help to pastors, especially traditional expositors, who are skeptical of many of the innovative practices some pastors are using to reach postmodernist; thus, this book reflects a balance approach to modifying one's preaching style to effectively reach postmodernist, while remaining consistent with conservative biblical preaching principles.

## Sources on Preaching Styles and Approaches

In light of understanding the homiletic dynamics influencing a pastor's choice of biblical text, the following contains a summary of essential sources:

1. Walter C. Kaiser - *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church*, thoroughly examines the relevance of the Old Testament in light of a dearth of preaching from the Old Testament. Despite the lack of direct emphasis on the Minor Prophets, this esteemed Old Testament scholar articulates the issues thoroughly enough that issues relating to preaching and the relevance of the Old Testament, indirectly includes concerns with preaching from the Minor Prophets.

2. R. Albert Mohler Jr. - *He is not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* highlights the importance of expository preaching, while identifying the pitfalls and concerns with approaches to preparing sermons for reaching postmodernist. Along the way, the preacher, one's theology and philosophy of ministry as well one's style and approach to preaching are discussed with the aim of helping pastors develop and proclaim god-fearing and authoritative expository messages.

3. Sidney Greidanus – *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* describes the process of drawing from the biblical text a biblically sound and relevant message. It discusses the form, relevance and problems with preaching from the various types of books in the Bible. Similarly, it discusses in detail sermon styles, selection of biblical text, the purpose of the sermon and appropriate ways to apply the Scripture.

4. Michael Duduit – *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching* is a collection of brief articles, which addresses the principle areas of preaching. It consists of 50 articles by

various authors. Articles are written about sermon styles, hermeneutics, ministry concerns, every aspect of sermon preparation, delivery of the message and many other issues.

### Resourceful Commentaries on the Minor Prophets

The following is a brief summary of the most significant commentaries on the Minor Prophets; however, the list is not comprehensive:

1. Eugene H. Merrill, Richard D. Patterson and Thomas J. Finley - *An Exegetical Commentary* is a three volume set on nine of the Minor Prophets. These books are a part of the *The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary* series, which has not been completed. At any rate, these books address most of the exegetical concerns in language the average pastor can understand and draw conclusions about the meaning of the text. Though these commentaries are biblically sound, the comments are rather brief.

2. Thomas Edward McComiskey - *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* reflects one of the most exhaustive works available on the Minor Prophets. As the title states, this enormous commentary effectively conveys both exegetical and expository comments.

3. Peter C. Craigie - *The Twelve Prophets* is a two volume set, which are included in *The Daily Bible Study* series. This set is written for the laymen, but it contains enough devotional and expositional substance to be beneficial to the pastor's study.

4. Charles L. Feinberg - *The Minor Prophets* is a classic text for an undergraduate survey course on the Minor Prophets. It introduces the reader to each book, explains the

biblical text in paragraph form, makes minimal exegetical comments and occasionally it discusses the relevance of the biblical text in regards to contemporary concerns.

5. James Montgomery Boice - *The Minor Prophets: An Expositional Commentary* is a two volume set, which consists of expositional comments. This set will prove helpful in one's preparation to preach. It will suggest or help the preacher come up with illustrations applicable to their congregation.

6. Frank E. Gaebelein - *The Expositor Bible Commentary*, Volume 7 of a 12 volume set addresses the Minor Prophets. The comments on the Minor Prophets are written to constitute learning; thus, footnotes and cross-references are dispersed heavily throughout the book. Similarly, the comments are written in slightly technical terms with an aim of explaining the meaning of the biblical text; however, the average pastor and serious laymen can grasp and appreciate this work.

### Project's Contribution and Conclusion

As the problem of neglecting the Minor Prophets is not recent, one would assume many complete and direct works would exist; however, very few sources directly and fully address the issue. Possibly, concerns with preaching the Minor Prophets are deemed insignificant. Nevertheless, this project suggests the Minor Prophets are relevant to congregants and are equally significant in the proclamation of God's Word.

Unlike the sources in this literature review, this DMIN project will directly address the concerns pertaining to the scarcity of preaching from the Minor Prophets. It will not mention the lack of preaching in a brief statement or summary and proceed with making comments about the biblical text. It will not address a particular church's concern with

helping congregants appreciate and apply the principles taught in the Minor Prophets. Nor will it simply evaluate the matters pertaining to preaching and applying the biblical text in general or in a broad manner. Instead this project contends directly with why preachers choose not to preach from the Minor Prophets. In addition, it will analyze the research on evaluating preaching styles and approaches and the impact of the postmodernist movement alongside the specific reasons why the Minor Prophets are not preached. In the end, the aim of this project is to expose pastors to the force, applicability and accessibility of preaching the Minor Prophets.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this project will expose pastors to the necessity of preaching the Minor Prophets in proportion to one's regularity with preaching the other books of the Bible. It will suggest that careful study and much zeal will help one overcome the complexity of studying prophetic books of the Bible. This project will provoke pastors to embrace the eschatological concepts within the Minor Prophets as well as it shall remind pastors of the necessity of exhorting their congregants about the hope of the return of Christ, one's deliverance from the judgment and the wrath to come and the eternal state of the believer. Similarly, this project will engage the pastor's philosophy of ministry, approach to preaching and the impact of the postmodernist movement upon his preaching. In the end, it will prove the Minor Prophets are applicable, relevant and profitable for instructing congregants in the 21st Century.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Biblical and Theological Foundations**

Amid the influx of problems with choosing a passage to preach, one's style of preaching and the overemphasis on relevancy, the neglect of the Old Testament and equally as important the neglect of the Minor Prophets are among those concerns. Given the neglect of the Minor Prophets, this chapter articulates the biblical and theological basis for urging pastors to preach more often from the Minor Prophets.

#### **Biblical Mandate to Preach**

At the outset it seems plausible to briefly suggest preaching is a biblical mandate and is God's primary means for communicating knowledge about Himself, instructions about how man can effectively relate to God and the truths about redemption and the life of a Christian. The phrase "Preach the word" in II Timothy 4:2 is forcefully conveyed by the Apostle Paul in timeless language, which commands all faithful preachers to proclaim the Word of God. Indeed the context surrounding this phrase, "preach the word", enhances the force and lucid command of the Apostle Paul; II Timothy 4:1-4 states:

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

Paul earnestly appeals to Timothy in the presence of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ to preach the Word of God. Though Paul's command is firm, he further instructs

Timothy to consistently preach, while enduring the cry for pleasure-oriented sermons and enticements to preach fables or false doctrines. Nonetheless, the command is to preach the Word of God.

### **The Whole Counsel of God Includes the Minor Prophets**

In Paul's exhortation and at the time his foreseeable final words to the elders from Ephesus, he states in Acts 20:27, "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God." As a matter of fact, for three years Paul teaches these believers, but now he does not expect to see them again. In that regard, he assures them that their blood is not upon him, because he has taught them the "whole counsel of God". The word "counsel" is the Greek word "βουλή", which may refer to the plan, purpose or will of God.<sup>1</sup> In this context, Paul implies he taught the believers at Ephesus the "whole counsel" or all of the will of God. Paul's instructions include discussion about salvation, because he claims to be "innocent of the blood of all men", Acts 20:26. Further, Paul's instructions include ample emphasis on the doctrines of the faith, because he warns the church in Acts 20:28-30 to be aware of false teachers.

Rationally, if Paul teaches the believers at Ephesus the "whole counsel of God" or all there is to know about God, one has to conclude Paul teaches and preaches from the Old Testament. Justifiably, Paul's knowledge of the Old Testament and his constant disputes with Judaizers, suggest Paul preaches and teaches often, if not solely, from the Old Testament. Though not discarding the importance of the New Testament, the working of the Holy Spirit in revealing the truth or the disciples' testimony about the life

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* In The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 392.

of the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul's primary text has to be the Old Testament. Therefore, the Old Testament is principally involved in conveying the "whole counsel of God". In support of this line of reasoning, Walter Kaiser writes:

Paul also based his teaching on the Old Testament. He preached what he had received from the Old Testament Scriptures. Said he, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day *according to the Scriptures*" (I Cor. 15:13-4, italics added). But even more definitively, when Paul was on trial for his life, he affirmed, "Now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers" (Acts 26:6 NASB). He concluded by saying, "And so, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day ... stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place" (Acts 26:22 NASB). His testimony was that he believed "everything that [was] in accordance with the Law, and that [was] written in the Prophets" (Acts 24:14 NASB).<sup>2</sup>

As the issue is considered one may raise concerns about whether Paul's use of the phrase "whole counsel of God" refers specifically to the books of the Old Testament or simply concepts one is taught about God. In brief, this paper will not fully address this matter; however, it is appropriate to understand the concepts Paul teaches the church at Ephesus includes precepts Paul learns and preaches from the Old Testament. In fact, both Sidney Greidanus and Walter Kaiser, two esteemed Old Testament scholars, imply that the Old Testament books are included in Paul's expression of the whole counsel of God.<sup>3</sup> As he explains the importance of preaching Christ from the Old Testament in light of preaching the whole counsel of God, Sidney Greidanus writes, "our concern is not to preach Christ to the exclusion of the 'whole counsel of God', but rather to view the whole counsel of God, with all its teachings, laws, prophecies and visions, in the light of Jesus Christ."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 27.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>4</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 227-228.

In summary, the Old Testament, which includes the Minor Prophets, is in part included in Paul's expression of the "whole counsel of God". Making such a conclusion substantiates the importance and necessity of preaching from the Minor Prophets.

### **"All Scripture", Inspired and Profitable Includes the Minor Prophets**

Although many contemporary preachers deem the Old Testament and even more so the Minor Prophets irrelevant, II Timothy 3:16 declares that "all Scripture" is inspired by God and is "profitable" for instructing believers on how to know God and how to live a godly life. This assertion by the Apostle Paul suggests one should not render any portion of the Bible useless. Instead one is encouraged to accept all of it as an authoritative revelation from God. Robert Cate accurately writes, "The authority of the Old Testament is real. It has a binding relationship upon the life of the Christian. But it does not stand on its own; it stands only in relationship to the ultimate authority of its Author and as part of the whole revelation of God."<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, preachers should enthusiastically seek to understand and articulate all of the Bible. As it states in II Timothy 3:16-17, all of the Bible is profitable "for instruction in righteousness" as well as such instructions are purposefully the means for equipping the saints. One writer notes, "Evidently, the charge to preach the word is closely connected to the fact that all Scripture is inspired by God."<sup>6</sup> Though not to minimize the authority or usefulness of the Old Testament or the New Testament, Sidney Greidanus cites Jeremiah 15:19 to clarify the profitability of the prophets' message; he effectively

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<sup>5</sup> Robert L. Cate, *An Introduction to the Old Testament and its Study* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 26.

<sup>6</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 1.

argues that the value and authority of the prophets' words are dependent upon God's words.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, the Minor Prophets are included in "all Scripture", which is authoritative and beneficial for contemporary Christians.

### **All Fulfilled Scripture Includes the Minor Prophets**

In contrast to much discriminatory selection of a biblical text to preach and the neglect of the Old Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ substantiates the importance of all Scripture, including the prophetic books. He asserts in Matthew 5:18, "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled". In this context, Jesus rejects the notion that His coming renders the Law and the Prophets useless. Rather He defends the authenticity and authority of the Old Testament as well as the necessity of the believer's anticipation of its fulfillment; thus, in meticulous and authoritative language, Jesus asserts the preservation and realization of the smallest Hebrew letter.<sup>8</sup> Richard Lenski incisively asserts,

And yet all that was written and that we now have in God's writing will stand forever down to the last letter and portion of a letter. All of it will stand in the fulfillment Christ will have wrought: every prophecy concerning Christ down to the last judgment and the final glory of his kingdom; every divine requirement concerning us, wrought out by Christ in our final glorification down to our eternal glorification in his kingdom; even the letter of the Word concerning the wicked in their consignment to hell.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, one must conclude the Minor Prophets along with all the books in Old Testament are necessary and useful for preaching.

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<sup>7</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* in *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 106-110.

<sup>9</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, vol. 1 of *Commentary on the New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001), 209.

## **Chapter 3**

### **An Analysis of Why the Minor Prophets Are Neglected**

#### **An Introduction to the Minor Prophets**

The Minor Prophets consist of twelve books, which are: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. They are written by twelve authors, whose names are used as the titles of these books. In the Hebrew Bible, the Minor Prophets are included in the “Latter Prophets” in contrast to the “Former Prophets”; these classifications simply indicate the order of placement in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the Latter Prophets are placed in the Hebrew Bible after the Former Prophets. These twelve books are included in a subcategory, “Minor Prophets,” in English translations of the Bible. They are called “Minor Prophets”, because of their size rather than their significance or the force of their message.<sup>2</sup> In fact, a more appropriate designation would be “the Twelve” as the rabbis suggest, according to Charles Feinberg.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps to best understand these books one has to understand the context surrounding their writings. In that regard, Robert Chisholm effectively describes the writings of the Minor Prophets in broad terms; he states:

These books originated in different time periods over a span of roughly three hundred years. Hosea, Amos, and Micah prophesied in the eight century B.C., while Nahum, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk delivered their messages in the seventh century B.C., probably toward the end of the century. Haggai’s and Zechariah’s ministries

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<sup>1</sup> Robert L. Cate, *An Introduction to the Old Testament and its Study* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 199-200.

<sup>2</sup> Paul N. Benware, *Survey of the Old Testament*, Rev. ed. In Everyman's Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993), 193-194.

<sup>3</sup> Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 9.

are specifically dated to the late sixth century B.C.; Malachi may originate as late as the mid-fifth century B.C.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, one cannot be certain when Joel, Jonah and Obadiah are written.<sup>5</sup> Charles Feinberg provides a succinct and insightful description of the times and messages of the Minor Prophets; he writes:

The human authors lived, labored, and wrote from the ninth to the fifth century BC. Their messages, which are of major significance, contain the dominant themes of the prophetic Scriptures concerning the Messiah, Israel, the nations, and the earthly Kingdom of the Lord. Their times belong in the era of the Assyrian Empire, the Babylonian period, and the postcaptivity centuries.<sup>6</sup>

In light of forthtelling and foretelling, Irvin Jensen provides a lucid summary of the topics in the Minor Prophets; he writes,

Many chapters deal with sin, warning, and judgment, but they do so because that is the very setting of God's Good News of redemption. There is a positive, bright evangel in every book of the 'The Twelve:' the irrepressible love of God to sinful men; the perseverance and pursuits of His grace; His mercies that follow the exiled and the outcast; His truth that goes forth richly upon the heathen; the hope of the Saviour of mankind; the outpouring of the Spirit; counsels of patience; impulses of tenderness and of healing.

The utterances of the prophets, for the most part, centered around four points in history: (1) their own times; (2) the threatening captivities (Assyrian and Babylonian) and eventual restoration; (3) the coming of their Messiah; and the reign of the Messiah as King.<sup>7</sup>

Given this brief summary of the Minor Prophets, one has to sense the enormity and force of these books, while at the same time one is confronted with the complexity of understanding and preaching relevant life changing sermons from these books.

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<sup>4</sup> Robert B. Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 335.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 396.

## An Introduction and Analysis of the Problem

As this project suggests – Are the Minor Prophets rarely preached? Is the thought of preaching from the Old Testament and more specifically the Minor Prophets an insignificant matter among conservative evangelicals? Is it true – the Minor Prophets are irrelevant as it pertains to addressing issues contemporary congregants are facing? A thorough bibliographic search reveals ample emphasis in academic settings has been placed on analyzing the effectiveness of preaching the Old Testament today; however, very little specific emphasis has addressed the concern with preaching the Minor Prophets. Furthermore, the evangelical community appears to have minimized the importance of biblical preaching, which includes neglecting the Minor Prophets in favor of preaching relevancy-oriented messages; thus, one notes, “it is to be feared that biblical preaching in the strict and proper sense of the word is, by and large across our country, the exception rather than the rule.”<sup>8</sup>

Interestingly, at least one Doctor of Ministry project has been written about this subject, “A Handbook on Teaching and Preaching of Joel and Malachi Complemented by a Daily Devotional”. That writer’s emphasis is on why the members of the church he pastors are unfamiliar with the Minor Prophets; as this project will identify and in agreement with Kim-San Yap, a congregation’s desire to embrace the Minor Prophets is minimized or depleted, if concerns with relevance, lack of understanding and a number of other concerns are not addressed.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), 163.

<sup>9</sup> Kim-San Yap, “A Handbook on Teaching and Preaching of Joel and Malachi Complemented by a Daily Devotional,” DMIN project, Biblical Theological Seminary In Theological Research Exchange Network, <http://www.tren.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/edocs/download2.cfm?CFID=5471170&>



Furthermore, many commentaries have made brief and unsubstantiated statements about the lack of preaching from the Minor Prophets. Perhaps, they assume one accepts and understands the problem. In light of the average Christian's perspective, one writer notes, "But the books as a whole are not understood and they remain like antiquities in a museum, interesting survivals of a past age, but having no particular meaning for life today."<sup>10</sup> More specifically Elizabeth Achtemeier notes:

Despite the treasures in such a rich lode, the church and the pulpit have long neglected the wealth found there. Out of the sixty-six chapters that make up the Minor Prophets, the three-year lectionary put out by the Consultation on Common Texts specifies that only twelve passages from the Minor Prophets be used as the text for the day. Most of the designated texts occur in Cycle C of the three-year lectionary. Two texts are listed from Hosea, Joel, and Micah. One text is to be used from each of Amos, Jonah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Malachi. None is listed from Obadiah, Nahum, and Zechariah.

If a Bible study uses one of these prophetic books, it is usually Hosea or Amos. As a result, few people in our congregation are even aware that there is a book of prophecy call Nahum or Zechariah. They know nothing about the content of Joel, Haggai, and Malachi.<sup>11</sup>

Indubitably, more effort has to be leveraged upon understanding and preaching the Minor Prophets.

Analogous to Elizabeth Achtemeier's assessment, a survey of the average preacher's past sermons or future preaching calendar may reveal similar concerns with the preacher's neglect of the Minor Prophets. In fact, a brief survey of John Piper's sermons, which can be found at [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org), reveals his lack of preaching from the Minor Prophets. Furthermore, John Piper seems to have concerns with preaching

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<sup>10</sup> Raymond Calkins, *The Modern Message of the Minor Prophets* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), vii.

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth R. Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 1-2.

from passages, which contain eschatological implications. Desiring God’s website provides an exhaustive list of John Piper’s sermons from 1980 to the present. A “by Scripture” analysis reveals that during this period only 33 sermons are preached from the Minor Prophets, which over 70% of these sermons are preached prior to 1990; furthermore, very few if any sermons are preached from the books of Daniel, Ezekiel or Revelation; in contrast, the emphasis has been on preaching the New Testament; consequently, 89 sermons are preached from the Gospel of John, 285 from the book of Romans, 54 from Ephesians and 32 are from I John.<sup>12</sup>

The chart below further illustrates the neglect of the Minor Prophets among well known evangelical pastors.

	Michael Youssef	Jack Graham	Alistair Begg	Robert Jeffress	Bobby Holt	Steven Davey	Ed Young	Charles Swindoll	John MacArthur
Pentateuch	10	26	1	23	0	0	2	3	2
OT History	9	0	0	15	0	11	2	1	0
Wisdom Lit.	18	7	2	21	3	0	11	3	4
Major Prophets	9	2	8	2	0	0	1	3	0
Minor Prophets	4	1	0	2	0	2	2	0	0
Gospels	37	11	54	24	38	15	20	38	63
Acts	3	2	10	0	0	1	0	0	2
Epistles	21	39	39	19	32	9	31	41	49
Revelation	3	1	4	26	3	45	0	0	1

The chart reflects the number of sermons each pastor preaches from a particular literary category in the Bible. It pertains only to the sermons they preach from October 2008 to

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<sup>12</sup> John Piper, “Resource Library: Sermons by Scripture,” Desiring God. <http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/> (accessed September 7, 2010).

the present. Furthermore, the data reflects the actual preaching schedule within the local church rather than what is broadcasted through their radio ministries.

Though the chart above effectively illustrates the dearth of preaching from the Minor Prophets, the following research further substantiates the premise. John MacArthur preached less than 20 expository messages from only three of the Minor Prophets throughout his ministry; over 85 percent of the sermons from the Minor Prophets are preached in the late 1970s.<sup>13</sup> No sermons are preached from the other nine books within the Minor Prophets. John MacArthur preached almost 200 sermons from Romans throughout his years of ministry; also, in contrast to neglecting 12 books in the Old Testament, he preached 45 sermons from I John, a relatively small book.<sup>14</sup>

The radio broadcast library at Insight for Living, Charles Swindoll's ministry reveals that one sermon from the Minor Prophets has been preached over the last five years.<sup>15</sup> Sermons are preached from every book of the New Testament, but II Thessalonians, II John and III John; 56 sermons are preached from Romans, 17 from I John and 21 from the Gospel of John.<sup>16</sup> As a result, one may conclude Charles Swindoll, a lucid and exceptional expositor, has not placed much emphasis on preaching the Minor Prophets in the last five years.

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<sup>13</sup> John F. MacArthur, "Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time," Grace to You. <http://www.gty.org/Resources/Sermons/scripture> (accessed 19 October 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, "Broadcast Library," Insight for Living. <http://www.insight.org/broadcast/library.html> (accessed 19 October 2010) and Charles R. Swindoll, "Sermon Outlines," Stonebriar Community Church. <http://www.stonebriar.org/worship/sermons/sermon-outlines/> (accessed 19 October 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Chip Ingram preaches topical messages and each individual message involves drawing biblical concepts from various passages throughout the Bible. Moreover, the information available on his ministry websites does not allow one to easily evaluate the sermon text. Actually, less than 10 sermons are online at Venture Christian Church.<sup>17</sup> Both the church and radio ministry websites are designed to accommodate one downloading messages in a series format along with the associated paraphernalia.<sup>18</sup> Though Chip Ingram is a persuasive and dynamic speaker and equally sound biblically, he would have to purposefully determine to preach from the Minor Prophets; however, it does not seem plausible.

Bill Hybels sermons for the last three years are online, but the only way to know what passage of Scripture is used one has to listen to every message; thus, the website is designed so that a person can choose to listen to messages related to their problem. Nevertheless, a brief review of the sermon titles and after listening to a number of the sermons, it is clear that often the topic drives the choice of biblical text. Furthermore, in this writer's estimation, unless Bill Hybels purposefully determines to do so, the topics he discusses will rarely suggest preaching expositional messages from the Minor Prophets.<sup>19</sup>

Rick Warren presents sermon series titles and dates with no emphasis on identifying the biblical text. Seemingly all series since the early 1980s are included; all the same, it

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<sup>17</sup> Chip Ingram, "Sermons," Venture Christian Church. <http://www.venturechristian.org/sermons.php> (accessed 19 October 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Chip Ingram, "Broadcasts," Living on the Edge Community. [http://www.livingontheedge.org/home/broadcasts/online\\_daily.php](http://www.livingontheedge.org/home/broadcasts/online_daily.php) (accessed 19 October 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Bill Hybels, "Willow Creek Community Church: Messages," Willow Creek Community Church. <http://www.willowcreek.org/mediaplayer/playerHome.aspx?cid=3&id=14> (accessed 20 October 2010).

seems unlikely that much effort, if any, has been on preaching expository messages from the Minor Prophets.<sup>20</sup>

Joel Olsteen preached 103 messages from January 2008 to the present.<sup>21</sup> Given the titles, most messages seem to imply two or three verses from select passages of Scripture are used. Though the messages are online, the website does not permit one to easily, if at all, evaluate the sermon text; however, given the titles it seems highly unlikely that much emphasis has been on preaching expository messages from the Minor Prophets.

Andy Stanley's church's web pages, as with many other accomplished pastors, pertaining to downloading messages are overwhelmed by his worldwide ministry; accordingly, the websites are designed to take into consideration the series' topics instead of exposition of books of the Bible; a cumbersome and random review of 60 of the 270 MP3 downloads, the description section, reveals 3 messages from Jonah and 1 from Hosea have been preached by Andy Stanley.<sup>22</sup>

### **Introduction to the Current Trends in Preaching**

If the Minor Prophets are rarely preached, why is this the case? Are there trends or reasons which explain this concern? What is involved with choosing a passage of Scripture to preach? Why are some passages preached and others are not? Some pastors do not preach certain passages of Scripture, because they have ministry philosophies,

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<sup>20</sup> Rick Warren, "All Saddleback Church Sermon Series (by date)," Saddleback Church. <http://www.saddlebackresources.com/en-US/Sermons/AllSermonSeries/AllSermonSeriesLandingPage.htm> (accessed 20 October 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Joel Olsteen, "Messages," Lakewood Church. <http://bookstore.lakewood.cc/c-61-messages.aspx> (accessed 20 October 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Andy Stanley, "North Point Resources: MP3s," North Point Community Church. <http://store.northpoint.org/messages/mp3s.html?speaker=11&p=6> (accessed 20 October 2010).

which prohibit or direct their attention to specific verses. Philosophies, such as, the message must be evangelistic, it cannot contain eschatological implications, it must be relevant to a contemporary issue and it must be overly optimistic are among the list of ideas guiding the selection of a text.

Others approach the task by asking themselves, "What are the issues my congregants are facing?" Upon creating a list of ideas they proceed from there looking for passages that address the issues. Clyde Fant asserts, "Regular, careful listening to the Word and the people - to the historic revelation and the contemporary situation - will provide more than adequate sermon ideas and content."<sup>23</sup> Some pastors preach whole books of the Bible, which indicates they spend a certain amount of time resolving the matter of which book to preach.<sup>24</sup> John MacArthur went a step further, he purposefully chooses to spend most his time in the New Testament.<sup>25</sup> Though brief, these introductory comments suggest pastors purposefully choose the biblical text to preach. They are guided in their selection of the biblical text by their ministry philosophies and style of preaching. In this writer's estimation, the current state of preaching in America involves prosperity preaching, resemblance of seeker-sensitive imitators, conversational preaching, culturally sensitive relevancy oriented preaching and biblical preaching.<sup>26</sup> "The trend today is toward topical messages focused on timely issues, human relationships, success and self-

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<sup>23</sup> Clyde E. Fant, *Preaching for Today* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 128.

<sup>24</sup> Stephen N. Rummage, *Planning Your Preaching: A Step-by-Step Guide for Developing a One-Year Preaching Calendar* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2002), 86.

<sup>25</sup> R. Albert Mohler, "Faithfully Proclaim the Truth: An Interview with John F. MacArthur," Preaching.com. <http://www.preaching.com/printerfriendly/11563456/> (accessed 11 September 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Gilley, Gary E. and Jay Wegter, *This Little Church Had None: A Church in Search of the Truth* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2009), 77-79 and Gary E. Gilley, *This Little Church Went to the Market: Is the Modern Church Reaching Out or Selling Out?* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2006), 16, 61, 65.

help, recovery from addictions, or similar themes," according to John MacArthur.<sup>27</sup> In Steven Lawson's correlation of the apostle's preaching with the present state of preaching, he states,

Tragically most of what passes for biblical preaching today falls woefully short of apostolic standards. Many pastors seem content to dole out pabulum to spiritual babies, instead of teaching the full counsel of God. Many evangelicals have succumbed to delivering secular-sounding, motivational pep talks aimed at soothing the felt needs of restless church shoppers or, worse, salving the guilty consciences of unregenerate church members. Rather than expounding the depths of God's Word, many Bible-believing ministers have chosen the path of least resistance, content to scratch the surface of shallow souls, and tickle the ears of languid listeners. The result is congregations are starving - even though many of the famished may not be aware of - settling for sickly sweet, yet totally inadequate, spiritual pabulum.

If people are to be brought to saving faith in Christ and are to mature spiritually, pastors must teach a comprehensive biblical message that is rooted in both the Old and New Testaments, focused on Christ, and full of doctrinal instruction.<sup>28</sup>

Conceivably, the dearth of preaching from the Minor Prophets is due to the lack of biblical integrity, concerns about relevance, implementation of secular and marketing church growth principles, yielding to the cry of congregants, minimal use of biblical content and ease of preaching relevant biblical text.

### **"Relevancy-oriented Style" Preaching**

Definitively, relevancy is one of the greatest concerns among evangelical preachers today. It is being overly emphasized as if applying the Bible has not always been the preacher's goal. Preaching has always involved bridging the cultural gap and drawing from biblical times an application for the hearer. In light of this premise, truthfully, pastors tend to struggle with balancing the amount and depth of explaining the Bible and

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<sup>27</sup> Steven J. Lawson, *Famine in the Land: A Passionate Call for Expository Preaching* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 12.

<sup>28</sup> Steven J. Lawson, *Famine in the Land*, 38.

the amount of applications. One writer effectively states, "While some preachers neglect biblical authority, others neglect the real-life struggles, questions, and needs of the people who sit before them."<sup>29</sup> Though pastors may need a reminder on occasion, it seems likely that many who hold to "relevancy-oriented style" preaching are using this concern to defend their preaching style and philosophy of ministry. Regrettably, this style of preaching may come at the price of not preaching the whole counsel of God, biblical authority and ultimately neglect of the Minor Prophets.

Perhaps, this style originates with Bill Hybels and Rick Warren, who possibly are consumed in marketing principles, the influence of modernism and the desire to reach the lost. Bill Hybels, who coins the phrase "unchurched Harry", admits that he builds his church on "relevant topical preaching", because he senses failure to be relevant in his own ministry.<sup>30</sup> In light of his success and Rick Warren's success, many have imitated their ministry philosophies with the goal of growing large churches. Interestingly, many seem to positively embrace modernism and its influence on culture, particularly narcissistic ideologies. In fact, Rick Warren identifies this phenomenon as one of his challenges; he states, "it is an incredibly difficult task to lead people from self-centered consumerism to being servant-hearted Christians."<sup>31</sup> At any rate, out of a desire to reach the lost and grow large churches relevancy-oriented preaching is rampant.

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<sup>29</sup> Daniel Overdorf, *Applying the Sermon: How to Balance Biblical Integrity and Cultural Relevance* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2009), 30.

<sup>30</sup> Keith Willhite, *Preaching with Relevance: Without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001), 18-19.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1995), 46.



Redolent of how some pastors target segments of the population, in this case those under the influence of modernism, one writer notes:

The hooks and verbiage of sermons that interested the pre-communication-age communicant can no longer be tied to the agricultural industrial past. Further, it is not immediately clear, in listening to sermons written from this pre-1950 worldview, that there is an understanding of how much the world has changed. The new corporation person is a narcissist. It is harder to challenge the new narcissists with self-sacrifice and commitment. These persons are looking for the self-shelf: self-fulfillment, self-authentication, and self-gratification. In the middle of a confusing culture, marketplace preaching must learn the language everyday people understand and the subjects they are interested in.<sup>32</sup>

Calvin Miller further notes, "Local-specific sermonizing may still intrigue specific congregations with theologically-oriented sermons. But the growing churches have found ways to preach within a new vernacular;" thus, they preach sermons that are biblical and relational.<sup>33</sup> An impressive analysis of trends among Lutheran pastors reveals that 75% of trendsetters are preaching topical sermons in the form of multi-part series and most agree that "needs and interests of the hearers should be the primary concern."<sup>34</sup> In fact, this same analysis lists the following sermon series titles: "Life-Changing Conversations", "Happy New You", "Where is God When You Need Him?" and "All about Anger".<sup>35</sup>

Indubitably, relevancy-oriented preaching is embraced, but how does it affect the lack of preaching from the Minor Prophets. At the outset the average preacher may argue the Old Testament and the Minor Prophets are irrelevant to contemporary congregants.

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<sup>32</sup> Calvin Miller, *Marketplace Preaching: How to Return the Sermon to Where It Belongs* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 37.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> David S. Luecke, "Trends Among Lutheran Preachers," *World & World*, Vol. XIX, no.1 (Winter 1999): 23.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Similarly, the desire to reach the unchurched individualists suggests simple, personal and specific issues have to be addressed. For example, the culture is inundated with relationship problems, which constitutes the need for sermons on forgiveness, anger, marriage and how to get along with one another. As a result, the Old Testament and the Minor Prophets are less likely to be considered, because the easier to comprehend verses in the Bible about these subject matters may be found the New Testament.

### **"Conversational Style" Preaching**

In addition to the influx of discussion about preaching sermons that are relevant to contemporary congregants, ideas about how to communicate the message are having an impact on the pastor's choice of text, "conversational style preaching". Though this is the case, there are a number of factors that have to be understood. First, this style of preaching is complementary of relevancy-oriented preaching; however, it is an attempt to improve upon relevancy-oriented preaching. Similarly, it is an attempt to integrate and reinforce certain known communication practices among preachers. For example, learning and improving one's voice is emphasized. Nonetheless, conversational style preaching is not simply a reinforcement of communication principles. It is a comprehensive and complete style and philosophy of preaching. Lastly, conversational style preaching is primarily the style of preaching Andy Stanley espouses.

What is conversational preaching? It is a life-changing conversation with congregants about a single and relevant issue, which contains only one point. It involves seven imperatives, "determine your goal", "pick a point", "create a map", "internalize the

message", "engage your audience", "find your voice" and "start all over".<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the major tenets of conversational preaching are:

- It is a topical message which centers on one point.
- The outline is relational, "ME- WE - GOD - YOU - WE".
- It involves less information and explanation of the biblical text and more application and inspiration on the part of the preacher.
- The audience is more important than the biblical text.
- The communication of the message controls the order of the outline rather than the biblical text.
- The communication of the message should be entertaining.
- It is superior to three point sermons, expository preaching, because its goal is life change.
- It involves selecting biblical texts that will support the topic being discussed.
- It engages the audience with a style and approach that reaches people today instead of an approach and method of another era.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the concerns with relevancy-oriented preaching, it seems unlikely that those who adapt to conversational style preaching would preach from the Minor Prophets. Perhaps, the emphasis on less information and explanation of the biblical text suggests most of the content in the Minor Prophets would be too cumbersome to explain. Similarly, rendering expository preaching antiquated and useless suggests the many details in the Minor Prophets are insignificant for life change in this age.

### **Postmodernism's Impact on Preaching**

Conceivably, the greatest struggle among evangelical pastors is to resolve how to reach the world and more specifically young people with the gospel. In addition, the influence of marketing and seeker-sensitive church growth principles, has led to even more confusion about what to wear, how to preach and what to preach. At the apex of

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<sup>36</sup> Andy Stanley and Lane Jones, *Communicating for a Change* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Publishers, 2006), 13.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 61-64, 90-92, 96, 119, 133.

implementing these strategies, new paradigms and movements have eclipsed the evangelical community; congruent with Christianity in America, one writer notes “where the church in Europe once held a place of significant influence, by the end of the twentieth century it was almost completely irrelevant.”<sup>38</sup> Actually, an almost new vocabulary has been embraced by the average evangelical pastor. Many are explaining their philosophy of ministry by using terms such as postmodernism, emergent church and deconstructionism. In light of brevity and sustaining the focus of this project, these terms will not be fully explained; however, postmodernism’s impact upon preaching suggests an explanation with a view of understanding its impact upon the preacher’s style, choice of text and ultimately the lack of preaching from the Minor Prophets.

The premise of this dialogue is that the Minor Prophets are being neglected indirectly. Pastors in search of ways to reach young people with the gospel have concluded that the way churches functioned a generation ago is no longer effective. They have determined worship and preaching styles of the past are no longer useful in connecting with an audience.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, many pastors are defending their ministry philosophies and communication practices with research that indicates a certain population of lost people are expecting an openness to biblical theology, preaching that is simple and directly addresses the congregants’ personal issues as well as a relationship oriented and non-threatening environment. Much of this dialogue though rather controversial has been articulated in what is called postmodernism. Consequently,

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<sup>38</sup> Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christians: The Good News About the End of Christian America* (New York: Doubleday Religion, 2010), 5, 10.

<sup>39</sup> Elmer L. Towns and Ed Stetzer, *Perimeter of Light: Biblical Boundaries for the Emerging Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2004), 160-163.

preaching a simple, relationship oriented, non-threatening and ‘help me with my personal issue’ message has rendered the Minor Prophets useless in reaching these goals.

Defining postmodernism requires one to have a fundamental understanding of modernism. Modernism is an anthropocentric worldview, which suggests knowledge is inherent within man rather than in God and His Word; furthermore, through man’s own reasoning and scientific method he resolves what is true.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, modernism replaces the worldview, which suggests truth is found in Christ and the Bible.<sup>41</sup> Though rather philosophical, postmodernism is an attempt to replace modernism; it suggests truth is relative and does not depend upon scientific reasoning.<sup>42</sup> Millard Erickson summarizes the tenets of postmodernism as: the denial of personal objectivity, the uncertainty of knowledge, the death of any ill-inclusive explanation, the denial of the inherent goodness of knowledge, the rejection of progress, the supremacy of community-based knowledge and the disbelief in objective inquiry.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the extensiveness and rather technical language, J.P. Moreland makes the following conclusions about the meaning of postmodernism:

As a philosophical standpoint, postmodernism is primarily a reinterpretation of what knowledge is and what counts as knowledge. More broadly, it represents a form of cultural relativism about such things as reality, truth, reason, value, linguistic meaning, the self, and other notions. On a postmodernist view, there is no such thing as objective reality, truth, value, reason, and so forth. All these are social constructions, creations of linguistic practices, and as such are relative not to individuals, but to social groups that share a narrative.

Postmodernism denies the correspondence theory, claiming that truth is simply

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<sup>40</sup> Kathryn R. Ludwigson, “Postmodernism: A Declaration of Bankruptcy,” *Evangelical Theological Society papers*, 0436 (March 1994): 1-3.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 13, 18-20.

<sup>43</sup> Elmer L. Towns and Ed Stetzer, 158.

a contingent creation of language which expresses customs, emotions, and values embedded in a community's linguistic practices. For the postmodernist, if one claims to have the truth in the correspondence sense, this assertion is a power move that victimizes those judged not to have the truth.<sup>44</sup>

Beyond a basic understanding of postmodernism, one has to understand deconstructionism. Deconstructionism is an extreme form of postmodernism, which reduces objective truth to subjective truth or even worse whatever each individual deems to be true. Millard Erickson says, it “goes beyond this to reject the idea of any sort of objectivity and rationality. It maintains that all theories are simply worked out to justify and empower those who hold them, rather than being based on truth.”<sup>45</sup> He further argues:

It moves from relativism to pluralism in truth. Not only is all knowing and all speaking done from a perspective, but each perspective is equally true or valuable. The meaning of a statement is not to be found objectively in the meaning intended by the speaker or the writer, but is the meaning that the hearer or reader finds in it. “What it means to me” is its meaning, even if that is quite different than what it says to you.<sup>46</sup>

Unquestionably, this sort of thinking is extremely dangerous in the context of applying hermeneutic and homiletic principles. An expositor who holds this perspective is likely to misinterpret Scripture. In light of this provocative stance in preaching one writer succinctly notes:

One of the weaknesses in the modern day church is that we have left off the preaching of objective truth and substituted something that won't necessarily do the job, subjective truth. It may be true that Jesus has done something for me, but unless I understand the objective truth of Jesus Christ, I am not really going to understand what it is that He did. Sermons filled with endless stories about the preacher betray a very subjective view of the truth. You might get to know the

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<sup>44</sup> James P. Moreland, “Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and the Postmodern Turn,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no.1 (March 2005): 80-81.

<sup>45</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith*, 18-20.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

preacher well, but you won't really learn the Way, the Truth, and the Life.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, Albert Mohler identifies six challenges facing the church in regard to deconstructionism, an extreme postmodernism perspective impacting upon the culture. The six challenges are: a deconstruction of the truth, the death of the meta-narrative, the demise of the text, the dominion of the therapy, the decline of authority and the displacement of morality.<sup>48</sup> Albert Mohler asserts the following explanation for each concern:

- Destruction of the truth is a philosophical attempt to disprove divine revelation or scientific method as reliable sources of truth; in their place truth is described as “socially constructed, plural and inaccessible to universal reason”;
- The death of the meta-narrative suggests “all grand and expansive accounts of truth, meaning and existence”, such as the gospel, are fictitious or at best one option among a number of others;
- The demise of the text advocates, “it is the reader of a text who establishes meaning and there are no controls to limit the interpretation a reader might give;”
- Dominion of therapy is a rationalistic and autonomy of self approach to resolving man's problem; repentance of sin and obedience to God are invalidated for a feel good, positive self-esteem and lack of concern for morality approach;
- Decline of authority suggests God, the Bible and pastor and other authority figures who hold to traditional authoritative and autocratic roles are suspect or rendered oppressive;
- Displacement of morality conveys replacing negative or corrective biblical principles which are representative of a “traditional moral code”, oppression and totalitarian mentalities with a relativistic way of thinking.<sup>49</sup>

Given this brief explanation of postmodernism and an objective of understanding why the Minor Prophets are not preached today, one has to ask, “How has postmodernism affected the preacher's style and choice of text?” Though not exhaustive,

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<sup>47</sup> Sean Richardson, “Subjective Truth vs. Objective Truth” MisterRichardson.com. <http://misterrichardson.com/?p=403> (accessed 4 November 2010).

<sup>48</sup> R. Albert Mohler, “What is Truth? Truth and Contemporary Culture” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 48, no.1 (March 2005): 67-70.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

three key hermeneutical and homiletical considerations seem to emerge from the immense dialogue about the impact of adopting postmodernist's practices in ministry settings.

First, there is much discussion about biblical authority versus "practicing the Gospel". This premise suggests authenticity is more important than biblical authority. Further, biblical authority in a postmodernist's mind is a traditional and premodern ideology, which is subject to ruination or rather critical scrutiny.<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Wilson, an advocate of the supremacy of the "practicing the gospel" paradigm, suggests emphasis on living out one's faith will help or resolve the problem of embracing biblical authority.<sup>51</sup> Conversely, as one writer notes:

Wilson's approach neglects that a logical consequence of pluralism is a plurality of conceptions of what is meant by "practicing the gospel." Such a consequence it seems to me enjoins, rather than depreciates, the Evangelical need to have a clearer conception of the role of biblical authority in relation to identifying Jesus and His teachings. If one is exposed to many voices proclaiming radically different conceptions of the gospel and its associated ecclesiastical practices, questions about propositional truth become more important, not less, for the Evangelical concerned with "practicing the gospel".<sup>52</sup>

Unquestionably, as this statement proposes, ecclesiastical practices are negatively impacted by postmodernist's lack of acceptance of biblical authority and any attempt to minimize, preempt or compromise its importance.

Similarly, the postmodernist movement has led to many pastors avoiding certain passages of Scripture because of its negativity. According to Phillip Jensen, "the current

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<sup>50</sup> Kathryn R. Ludwigson, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Gurney, "How Firm a Foundation?: Foundationalism, Postmodernism, and Biblical Authority" Evangelical Theological Society papers, 0714 (March 2000): 8.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.



choice for most preachers today is the affirmative over the negative."<sup>53</sup> He further asserts:

Society at large pushes the preacher in this direction. Educational models promote the effectiveness of the affirmative style of teaching, as do most studies in advertising and public relations. Also, the relativism of today's postmodern thought is positive about all statements - all statements, that is, except negations! The ideology of a multicultural society requires positivity about alternative views and frowns upon any communication that threatens the fragile peace that has been established between communities.<sup>54</sup>

Thirdly, deconstructionism, an extreme form of postmodernism, has greatly impacted sound hermeneutical principles. Preaching, undeniably, is useless, heretical and destructive, if it is not based upon sound interpretations. Furthermore, normative interpretation principles in postmodernist terms are defunct, if they are based on an authorial intended meaning.<sup>55</sup> One writer notes, "The author has banished. The meaning of the text does not lie behind it (in the mind of the author, the original social setting, the original audience), nor even in the text itself. Rather, the meaning of the text lies in front of the text - in the now common question, the now common subject-matter of both text and interpreter."<sup>56</sup> Keith Putt, a postmodernist, argues that one should not attempt to find the original author's intended meaning, because such a task is "unattainable".<sup>57</sup> Perhaps, such confusion about how to arrive at truth along with a lack of normative hermeneutical principles discourages the use of the Minor Prophets.

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<sup>53</sup> Phillip Jensen "The Importance of Preaching the Negative as Well as the Positive" *The Council on Biblical Manhood & Womanhood* Vol. 5, no.2 (Fall 2000): 1.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith*, 19.

<sup>56</sup> Luiz G. Goncalves, "The Deconstructing of the American Mind: An Analysis of the Hermeneutical Implications of Postmodernism" *Evangelical Theological Society papers*, 4624 (March 1994): 2.

<sup>57</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith*, 130-132.

As a challenge to the evangelical community Scott Newman proposes that clear and firm "demarcation lines" must be established to restore sound hermeneutical principles; in fact, he suggests postmodernism has encouraged the use of allegory, continuing revelation instead of *sola scriptura* and deep, experiential and mystical interpretations.<sup>58</sup> In light of the Christian interpreter's defense, Scott Newman asserts, "The heartbreak is the dramatic extent to which the church has been infected by the winds of the 'me generation'. Her denigration of doctrine is a prime example of many leaders to interpret the Bible from a basis of sound hermeneutics."<sup>59</sup>

Indeed through deductive reasoning one has to emphatically conclude the Minor Prophets, much of the Old Testament and the Bible will suffer neglect in a postmodern culture. Preaching practices and ministry philosophies lacking appropriate emphasis on the biblical mandate to preach the Bible, denial of divine inspiration, denial of biblical integrity and acceptance of overly narcissistic ideologies result in selectively preaching culturally accepted passages. Understandably, the Minor Prophets' lucid emphasis on the sovereignty of God, judgment and accountability for actions renders them oppressive, totalitarian and useless in a postmodernist's mind. Yet, Walter Kaiser effectively challenges expositors; he exclaims, "the inroads of postmodernism must not be ignored or taken for granted. It is another strong reason why the teaching and challenging ministry of applying the Old Testament text must not dwindle in our day but remain strong, vigorous, and methodically sound."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Scott Newman, "The Scandal of Reason - Part II: A Response to Post-Modern Evangelicalism" *Conservative Theological Journal* 2, no.4 (March 1998): 49-50.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>60</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 11.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the innovative methods and philosophies of preaching today involve being culturally sensitive, marketing-driven, personal needs oriented, conciliatory and conversational, which includes relevancy-oriented and conversational preaching styles as well as the denigrating affects of postmodernism. Though argumentative, many of these factors are pervasively drawing the evangelical community away from biblical preaching and conservative theology. Similarly, they are questioning biblical authority and the necessity of preaching the whole counsel of God. As a result, the Minor Prophets are considered irrelevant and useless.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Prohibitions & Counterarguments in Support of Preaching the Minor Prophets**

#### **Two Reasons Prohibiting Preaching from the Minor Prophets**

Identifying myriads of direct and explicit resources, which identify why the Minor Prophets are rarely preached is impossible. In fact, in discussing the neglect of the Old Testament Walter Kaiser writes, "Our evangelical disparagements of the Old Testament are mostly in the realm of practice and not theory"; thus, few, if any, "openly discards" or attempt to totally disapprove its usefulness, but weeks and months may elapse without any consistent exposition of the Old Testament in one's preaching and teaching.<sup>1</sup> At any rate, through deductive reasoning one can draw from research about the neglect of the Old Testament ample support to suggest, if the Old Testament is neglected, the Minor Prophets are among those books that are seldom preached. Accordingly, at the outset this chapter identifies and evaluates two key reasons why the Minor Prophets are neglected. The latter half of this chapter involves responding to all the concerns with the lack of preaching from the Minor Prophets as are outlined in the current and preceding chapter.

Though there are many reasons why the Minor Prophets as well as the Old Testament are not preached and taught, the objective of this portion of the paper is to only discuss two of the key reasons. The two that are chosen do not necessarily reflect research, which substantiates their importance or impact in contrast to other reasons for why the Minor Prophets are sparingly preached. Instead, these two reasons are simply drawn from this writer's observation of others neglect of the Minor Prophets.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *The Old Testament in Contemporary Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 11.

### The New Testament is Preferred

First, the Minor Prophets are sparingly preached, because pastors tend to preach more often from the New Testament. In fact, one of Lifeway's recent research projects, consisting of 450 sermons by different pastors, indicates a dearth of preaching from the Old Testament; it reveals that approximately 70 percent of the sermons in this research consist of preaching from the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, as Ed Stetzer summarizes the research, he explicitly acknowledges the lack of preaching from the Old Testament and he challenges pastors to preach the whole counsel of God; thus, as he expounds upon Paul's declaration of inspiration and applicability of the Word of God from II Timothy 3:16, Ed Stetzer writes, "all of God's Word is useful" . . . "this includes Leviticus, Amos, and the lineage of Jesus."<sup>3</sup>

Generally, the New Testament is preached more frequently than the Old Testament, because it seems to be easier to interpret and preach.<sup>4</sup> John Bright argues that the New Testament is easier to interpret and to make relevant applications, because it is written to Christians.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, the Old Testament is written to the Israelites; therefore, one's understanding has to include another layer of hermeneutical consideration. For example, one could ask, "What are the hermeneutical and homiletical concerns with preaching

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<sup>2</sup> Ed Stetzer, "How Do You Handle the Word of God?" Ed Stetzer The Lifeway Research Blog <http://www.edstetzer.com/2009/06/how-do-you-handle-the-word-of.html> (accessed 18 November 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible As Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), XII.

<sup>5</sup> John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), 183.

about a Christian's responsibility to adhere to the municipal and moral laws of the Old Testament?"<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, John Bright states:

But the hermeneutical problem is fundamentally simple (I did not say easy). It is simple because the New Testament addresses the church - and we too address the church; the New Testament witnesses to Christ - and we too witness to Christ. The task of explication, the translation, the application, and the enforcing of the message may be backbreakingly hard; but there is (how shall one say it?) no hermeneutical transfer.

The Old Testament is different in that it was not in the first instance a document of the church at all: it was not written by Christians for Christians. The more seriously we take it in its plain meaning, the more clearly we see that it is a document of a religion genetically related to our own, yet not precisely the same as our own. It is a document of the faith of Israel, and only secondarily a document of the church. Its message is not of and by itself a Christian message. Yet we must preach a Christian message from it (what other kind, pray, are we to preach?), if we are to use it in the pulpit at all.<sup>7</sup>

In agreement with John Bright, Walter Kaiser writes, "In our day, people are more inclined to read and assimilate the simple and more easily digested accounts of the life of Christ and the history of the early church as recorded in the New Testament. The rugged brand of Old Testament religion is not for them, it would seem."<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, some pastors favor preaching from the New Testament, because they lack knowledge in the Hebrew language and culture.<sup>9</sup> In addition, if the New Testament, the Greek language and the Greek culture is what one is acquainted with, the New Testament will be preached more often. "Preachers often know the New Testament better - and we are quick to preach that which we know best since it makes for easier preparation; perhaps the preacher's congregation knows the New Testament better," according to one

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<sup>6</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 29-30.

<sup>7</sup> John Bright, 183.

<sup>8</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *The Old Testament in Contemporary Preaching*, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Scott M. Gibson, *Preaching the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006) 22-23.

pastor.<sup>10</sup> In brief, the Minor Prophets are rarely preached, because the New Testament seems to be easier to interpret, more familiar to both the pastor and his congregation and it requires less effort to articulate a message relevant to contemporary congregants.

### Complexity of Prophetic Passages

Desirous of the simple, easy to comprehend and non-confrontational suggest the Minor Prophets along with the Major Prophets will rarely be preached. Systematically and theologically drawing an application for a contemporary Christian from a pronouncement of judgment, which God delivers to the nation of Israel through the prophets, is a complex task. It is a task that has limited the use of prophetic passages.<sup>11</sup> In fact, one pastor declares, "The theological complexities in the Old Testament are often too difficult, and we don't want to touch them in the pulpit.' 'Who can understand the prophets anyway?' questioned another pastor."<sup>12</sup>

Among the list of considerations is the historical setting of the prophetic message. Often the prophet's background, the moral and spiritual condition of the nation or nations as well as God's covenantal agreement with the nation of Israel are essential to understanding the historical setting. Similarly, one has to consider whether the words of the prophet have been fulfilled. If not, one has to attempt to resolve when they will be fulfilled. As this question is pondered eschatological implications may arise. Painstakingly, all of this occurs before the homiletical phase of sermon preparation.

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<sup>10</sup> Scott M. Gibson, 24.

<sup>11</sup> John Koessler, *The Moody Handbook of Preaching* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 187.

<sup>12</sup> Scott M. Gibson, 23.

Nevertheless, systematically and theologically interpreting the biblical text suggests the interpreter must deploy appropriate hermeneutical principles to ensure that interpretation, proclamation and application are consistent with the whole of Scripture. The words “systematic” and “theological” are being used to suggest that aside from discerning the immediate context, pastors have to consider their interpretation in view of the whole of Scripture. In that regard, there are theological beliefs or systems that one may hold, which influences a pastor's interpretation. For example, as a New Testament Christian, the theological belief of eternal security influences how one understands the New Testament; thus, one would carefully interpret and preach John 15:6 so that congregants will not assume Christians can lose their salvation. In the prophetic books, the challenge is to adapt theological beliefs or systems, which express a consistent understanding of the covenants, the plan of redemption, the progression of revelation and God's plan and purpose for unfolding history in the life of both Israel and Gentile nations.

Given this basic understanding, possibly, the most complex issue pastor address when preaching prophetic passages is the matter of unfulfilled prophecy. In fact, Roy Zuck asserts that evangelicals “differ widely” on interpreting passages with eschatological implications.<sup>13</sup> Though there are many views on how to interpret and apply these passages, this project will only briefly suggest one perspective, dispensational and premillennial theology. The aim of presenting this perspective is not to fully understand it, but to expose one to the complexity of interpreting and applying prophetic passages. In that regard, Merrill Unger explains the complexity and necessity of an

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<sup>13</sup> Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Spring: Victor Books, 1991), 228.



effective theological system as it pertains to interpreting passages with eschatological implications; also, he unapologetically affirms expository preaching as well as dispensational and premillennial theology; thus, Merrill Unger makes the following assertions:

- "The reason why many ministers do not attempt to preach the Bible verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book, systematically and comprehensively, with each part of the whole, and the whole related to each part, is that they have never been taught that the Scriptures have a coherent plan and purpose and can be intelligibly dealt with in a comprehensive way, both analytically and synthetically."
- "It is the necessity of an adequate system of interpretation which will open up the Old and New Testament as a coordinated whole, that undoubtedly constitutes the chief barrier against expository preaching."
- The purpose of an effective system of interpretation is "to open up the Scriptures, to solve difficulties, explain things that differ, show the symmetry and harmony of the Scriptures and expound the whole under a unified plan."
- Understanding unfulfilled prophetic passages suggests a number of interpretive systems may be used. "The most common are the premillennial, postmillennial or amillennial views based on whether the second advent of Christ will occur before or after a future literal millennium or whether the spiritual millennium is already here and Christ's advent will usher in the eternal state."
- This writer favors the premillennial view because "Premillennialists are noted for their ability to expound prophecy, as well as the entire range of revealed Scripture. Most striking, perhaps, is their capacity to distinguish between things that obviously differ, such as the kingdom promised to Israel and the Church founded by Christ, and to avoid applying the great kingdom prophecies of the Old Testament to the Church of the New Testament, necessitating the most violent spiritualizing process to explain away the obvious resulting confusion of such a procedure."
- In contrast to a premillennial system of interpretation, one relegates to spiritualizing Old Testament prophecies; thus, "Wholesale spiritualizing of Old Testament prophecies by their application to the New Testament Church and vain attempts under non-premillennial interpretations to identify things that obviously differ, have involved so many difficulties and seeming discrepancies that many honest minds have given up any systematic exposition of the Bible altogether."<sup>14</sup>

In brief, interpreting unfulfilled prophetic passages involves one's theological belief about end times events, God's plan and purpose for Israel in the past, present and future.

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<sup>14</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *Principles of Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1955), 20-22, 36-37.

Similarly, one's understanding of the advent of Christ and the restoration of the Davidic Kingdom has to involve a systematic and theological interpretation of the whole of Scripture. Certainly, after building a historical context to interpret prophetic passages, discerning the meaning of specific words and placing proper emphasis on interpreting passages with eschatological implications one has to recognize the enormity and the complexity of the task, preaching the Minor Prophets in the 21st Century.

Understandably, one has to sense the complexity of interpreting prophetic books. Similarly, resolving the issues that might arise during the hermeneutics' phase of sermon preparation may discourage a pastor's use of the Minor Prophets. More specifically, the complexity and disunity of the doctrine of eschatology among evangelicals, has influenced pastors' use of passages and books of the Bible containing eschatological implications.

### **Counterarguments in Support of Preaching the Minor Prophets**

In view of responding to concerns with the lack of preaching from the Minor Prophets this project directly or indirectly identifies seven causes. These seven causes are: biblical integrity, topical preaching versus expository preaching, conversational style preaching, relevancy-oriented preaching, the impact of postmodernism, preferring the New Testament over the Old Testament and the complexity of comprehending prophetic as well as eschatological passages.

## Biblical Integrity

Fully articulating and defining biblical integrity is not the objective of this project; however, this project advocates that one's philosophy of biblical integrity impacts pastors' preaching style and choice of text. In fact, Dennis Cahill notes, "Our theology of Scripture affects not only sermon content but sermon design as well."<sup>15</sup> He further declares, "It is not a coincidence that homileticians who have doubts about the veracity of Scripture have tended toward forms that are more experiential and less conducive to propositional truth."<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, so long as biblical integrity is negated, the Minor Prophets, much of the Old Testament and possibly much of the New Testament are subject to suffer neglect.

Perceivably, the authority of the biblical text, the mandate to preach the whole counsel of God and the proper hermeneutical principles, core principles of biblical integrity, have to be embraced to provoke an awakening among evangelicals about the force and applicability of the Minor Prophets. Failure to do so will result in culturally sensitive, non-authoritative, unbiblical and anthropocentric sermons as well as much selective choosing of passages to preach. Emphatically, biblical integrity is essential if the regularity of preaching the Minor Prophets is to be increased and the Bible is to be effectively applied to the lives of people. In light of historic hermeneutical abuses in

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<sup>15</sup> Dennis M. Cahill, *The Shape of Preaching: Theory and Practice in Sermon Design* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2007), 49.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

concert with devaluing of the Old Testament text, Walter Kaiser poignantly states, "Few things will discourage the proper use of something more than abuse."<sup>17</sup>

### "Relevancy-oriented" & Conversational Style Preaching

Relevancy-oriented and conversational style preaching may effectively reach people, but such preaching styles rarely lead to a thorough exposition of the Minor Prophets. In fact, these styles make use of the elements of topical preaching. Pastors search through the Bible to find passages that directly address issues they sense their congregants are facing. Admittedly, relevancy-oriented and conversational style preaching directly address contemporary issues, provide the audience with steps to foster change and convey the message in easy to understand language.

In contrast to these topical preaching styles, expository preaching is a more effective style of preaching and increases the probability of one preaching from the Minor Prophets. Expository preaching or as some call it biblical preaching, may involve preaching systematically through books of the Bible. Generally, the philosophy of those who hold to expository preaching are a lot more apt to preach from the Old Testament and from the Minor Prophets; similarly, expositors who hold to premillennial and dispensational theological systems are all the more willing to preach the Minor Prophets.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, topical preaching seems to be concerned with connecting with the audience and teaching and preaching relevant messages. Though relevancy-oriented and conversational styles of preaching, topical preaching styles, do not by design imply

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<sup>17</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament*, 43.

<sup>18</sup> Merrill F. Unger, 20-23.

lack of biblical content; however, in general, these styles of preaching suggest a thorough exposition of the Minor Prophets would hardly ever occur.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps, the greatest fallacy about expository preaching is that it does not address the issues of the congregants. If addressing the congregants' problems is the preacher's objective, one has to simply keep preaching the Bible book by book and verse by verse; ultimately every issue, personal, familial, relational, national, financial, moral, ethical, spiritual, psychological or eternal issues, will be covered. Suppose one preaches expositively through the book of Micah each Sunday morning for three months. Congregants would hear messages about God's sovereignty, God's judgment, God's faithfulness, disobedience, the First Advent of Christ, national leader's moral responsibilities, sin and the need for a national revival. Humorously, one professor recommends his students preach a topical message "once every five years"; he further exclaims, "behind this playfulness is a loud call for preaching that is totally Biblical in that it is guided by God's Word in its origins, production, and proclamation."<sup>20</sup> In agreement with Walter Kaiser's comments, John Bright asserts:

Speaking for myself, I have to say that I regard the topical sermon as a great snare and a device to be resorted to as seldom as possible. Topical sermons can be biblical, but they very rarely are. They tend to be far more preoccupied with our problems and concerns than with faith's affirmations and almost never are adequately based in the biblical teachings.<sup>21</sup>

Convincingly, sustaining biblical integrity advocates the superiority of expository preaching in contrast to relevancy-oriented and conversational style preaching.

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<sup>19</sup> John Bright, 167.

<sup>20</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1981), 19.

<sup>21</sup> John Bright, 167.

Nonetheless, expository style preaching characteristically utilizes hermeneutical and homiletical principles that suit preaching any book of the Bible. Foremost, it seems to have a close affinity with historical grammatical interpretation principles. Similarly, it involves a thorough and meticulous study of a book of the Bible. Given such thorough study, many of the contextual, grammatical and theological issues are easier to resolve; it also strongly emphasizes the use of the biblical text.<sup>22</sup> Lastly, if this level of detail is involved and as an expositor becomes proficient with this level of study, teaching and preaching the Minor Prophets will not be as time consuming or pose the threat of being too complex.

Furthermore, in responding to relevancy-oriented and conversational style preaching the two primary mandates in the Bible are clear, "preach the word" and "make disciples" (Matt. 28:18-20, 2 Tim. 4:2). In contrast to adhering to cultural distinctions as well as marketing and church growth principles, the preparation and objective of the sermon is not performance oriented, results-driven, entertaining, non-threatening and resemblance of self-help psychology. Instead consider the following biblical principles about preaching:

- Results are not centered on how many people attend a service. Rather than numerical results, the Bible primarily guarantees the Word of God itself "will not return void" (Isa. 55:9-11). In fact, both positive and negative results will be the outcome of preaching (Acts 17:3-4).
- Paul's preaching met resistance and opposition often (Acts 13:39, Acts 14:1-4).
- Jesus' preaching met opposition (Matt. 7:26-27).
- Preaching may or may not involve eloquence (Acts 18:24, 1 Cor. 2:2).
- Preaching ought to be characteristically sincere and from a clear conscience (1 Thess. 2:3-4, 2 Cor. 4:2).
- Preaching ought to please God rather than man (1 Thess. 2:4).

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<sup>22</sup> Stephen N. Rummage, *Planning Your Preaching: A Step-by-Step Guide for Developing a One-Year Preaching Calendar* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2002), 80-85.

- Preaching should not be with clever words, which are as a result of human wisdom (1 Cor. 1:17).

In light of biblical support for being relevant or interesting, Walter Kaiser asserts:

the apostle Peter concluded that some of Paul's writing were hard to understand (2 Pet. 3:16); would such difficult matters pass the "interest" test? Why didn't Peter just create his own meanings and not worry about what propositional teachings Paul might have had in mind? If teaching and preaching also have as one of their main goals to effect change in the lives of the listeners, would all of those apostolic or Old Testament prophetic calls for change be welcomed at first blush as being "interesting" by all listeners?

In fact, the criteria of interest may be linked to more modern values, such as brevity of the message or the number of memorable illustrations peppered throughout its short duration. This matter of "interest" also may indicate that our contemporaries are becoming more like connoisseurs of listening to messages rather than being those who are moved in their hearts to act and become doers of the Word (James 1:22).<sup>23</sup>

Understandably, as Walter Kaiser advocates, entertaining the interest of the audience does not rest solidly on biblical grounds. Rather relevance is secondary to accurately understanding, teaching and applying the biblical text. A further analysis of Walter Kaiser's statement suggests the real problem is not whether the message is easy to comprehend or relevant, instead it is a spiritual matter.

Certainly connecting with the audience is important. Similarly, applying the Scripture in a manner that will help the listener to understand and apply the biblical text is important. Conversely, the audience nor the illustrations one may use are more important than articulating the Bible, getting congregants to read and comprehend the Bible and ultimately helping congregants attain a level of spiritual maturity that complements congregants' personal ability to read, interpret and apply the Bible. In a balanced approach, one writer notes, "They are influenced by theology, theology of preaching, hermeneutics, rhetoric, culture, and literary criticism. The preacher concerned

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<sup>23</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *The Majesty of God in the Old Testament: A Guide for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 19-20.

with being both biblical and relevant must enter in the dialogue about the newer forms, seeking always those that are faithful both to the gospel and the listener."<sup>24</sup>

Though not dismissing the sentiments of a balanced approach, the Bible and the structure of the message take precedence over the audience. First, the intended meaning God conveys through the original author should not be overlooked or discounted at expense of reaching the audience. Michael Easley poignantly notes:

According to the apostle Paul, the aim of every preacher should be: "Holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). A preacher's comments, opinions, anecdotes, and application are then to support the clear meaning of the text.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, the structure or outline of the sermon has to "show the overall unity and progression of the passage".<sup>26</sup> Justifiably, desiring to declare the biblical text rather than pleasing and entertaining people, postures one to fulfill the biblical mandate to preach the whole counsel of God; thus, one is more likely to expound the profound and applicable words of the Minor Prophets.

Though one may argue such a method primarily involves information dissemination that is not true. The objective ultimately is to make disciples, help them to mature and to equip them for the work of the ministry (Matt. 28:18-20, Eph. 4:11-13). Likewise, Haddon Robinson, Ramesh Richard and Donald Sunukjian all suggest within their definition of expository preaching or biblical preaching that the goal of proclaiming the Word in concert with the Holy Spirit is to provoke and impress upon the listener the need

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<sup>24</sup> Dennis M. Cahill, 23.

<sup>25</sup> John Koessler, 32-33.

<sup>26</sup> Donald Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching Truth with Clarity and Relevance* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2007), 42.



to change or grow spiritually.<sup>27</sup> In fact, one advocate for expository preaching argues, "the pulpit is not just for disseminating more information; it is the platform from which our hearers are motivated to godliness by example and exposition."<sup>28</sup> Indubitably, true exposition should present "the hearer with a forced decision. We will obey or disobey the Word of God."<sup>29</sup>

A 20-minute talk about the audience or the audience's concerns from various passages of Scripture in concert with relevant personal illustrations may instruct the audience about a personal issue. In contrast, it does not help congregants fall in love with the Bible and the God of the Bible. Instead of helping congregants get a clear and thorough understanding of a passage, so that they can apply it in their own lives, later recall it in the midst of living for God and understand it well enough to teach others, relevancy-oriented and conversation style preaching either assumes congregants know the context of the passage they are preaching or it is not important for them to learn it. One writer effectively articulates the issue; he writes:

The lack of contextual insight in our sermons may be explained by our ignorance, yet another factor is likely at work. Perhaps the *fear of not being relevant* keeps some of us from thoroughly exploring the Bible's ancient settings. With biblical illiteracy so widespread, we reason, people need to have a passage explained in simple terms that make sense in our world. Rather than allow our listeners to become aware of the gulf between us and the times of biblical writers, we want to build a bridge quickly to move the characters of the Bible into our surroundings. What might otherwise prove to be a disequilibrating encounter with an ancient

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<sup>27</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1980), 19-20, Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 2005), 19 and Donald Sunukjian, 9-10.

<sup>28</sup> Ramesh Richard, 25.

<sup>29</sup> R. Albert. Mohler, *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 69.

writer becomes, instead, a familiar discussion of a domesticated text.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, replacing the flow of the biblical text with anthropocentric illustrations and talking points may include biblical truths, but the sermon lacks biblical authority. Although one may argue that ultimately the Bible teaches these truths, the sermon is "devoid of any power or authority from God".<sup>31</sup> "A successful sermon comes from God's Word, not my or someone else's experience, not another book or article. A biblical text cannot be a pretext: I can't read the text, then ignore it for the rest of the message (the preaching equivalent of bait and switch)."<sup>32</sup> In fact, any illustration not taken from the Bible is subject to major scrutiny. Consequently, inundating a sermon with personal experiences may be entertaining, but it is not an authoritative word from God.

In brief, relevancy-oriented and conversational style preaching are topical preaching styles, which would rarely result in a thorough exposition of any of the Minor Prophets. As this section conveys, these preaching styles involve sermons that interest congregants in rather relational and simplistic language, which often lack biblical authority. Consequently, pastors should embrace expository preaching. It is a style that encourages the use of the biblical text and greatly enhances the probability of one preaching proportionately from the Minor Prophets.

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<sup>30</sup> Scott M. Gibson, 138.

<sup>31</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 206.

<sup>32</sup> Marshall Shelley, *Changes Lives Through Preaching and Worship* (Nashville: Moorings, 1995), 151.

## Postmodernism

Given that postmodernism has greatly impacted the ministry philosophies of many pastors and ultimately their desire to preach from the Minor Prophets, it seems plausible that the appropriate conservative response would provoke evangelical pastors to increase their use of the Minor Prophets. Consider Walter Kaiser's passionate plea to pastors, he writes:

O pastor or teacher, I urge you not to follow any of these methods. They are laden with serious pitfalls, with the ultimate calamity being the loss of divine authority for what is being communicated from the pulpit if one consistently applies these rules to the end. What is needed today is solid preaching of the Word of God in all of its extent (the whole counsel of God), in all of its assertions (paragraph after paragraph, chapter after chapter), and in all of its power (as written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit)! To do anything less is like using a toy water pistol to put out a fire of secularism and paganism (and a host of other isms) that have engulfed the culture.<sup>33</sup>

Quite soberly this counsel is necessary, if subjectivity, the lack of historical-grammatical hermeneutical principles and the "what it means to me" ideology has such destructive force upon teaching and preaching the truth.

Accordingly, in view of countering preaching influenced by postmodernists, three propositions are essential. First, biblical integrity is inviolable; it demands that God the Father, the gospel and the Bible are objective truths; and ultimately contrasting views will influence one's choice of biblical text.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, preaching passages with negative connotations or passages involving God's judgment is biblical, though contrary to postmodernist's thinking, and is essential to sustain the biblical mandate to preach the whole counsel of God, which includes preaching the prophetic text. Lastly, unnecessarily

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<sup>33</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament*, 197.

<sup>34</sup> Scott Newman, "The Scandal of Reason - Part II: A Response to Post-Modern Evangelicalism" *Conservative Theological Journal* 2, no.4 (March 1998): 64-65.

and heretically redefining hermeneutical and communication principles decreases the reliability of the biblical text, rids the evangelical community of normative hermeneutical principles and depletes any chance of a biblically accurate and thorough exposition of the Minor Prophets.

Moreover, any ideology that questions the validity of biblical truth should be discarded in wholesale fashion, especially as it relates to preaching the Bible. In other words, pastors should render useless postmodern tenets that question the integrity of biblical truth. There is no room in the preaching ministry of God-fearing pastors for compromise. Namely, those who preach the Bible should not entertain compromises that involve the validity of the doctrines of inerrancy, verbal and plenary inspiration, the deity of Christ and salvation. In fact, the tenets of postmodernism, as is defined in the preceding chapter, are so disparaging and even more so deconstructionism, one can draw any conclusion he deem necessary about the meaning of a biblical text. Consequently, in the mind of postmodernists, John 3:16, Rom. 6:23, Rom. 10:1-13 and Eph. 2:8-10 really do not teach that man has to acknowledge he is a sinner, confess and repent of his sins and place his faith in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ as a payment for his sins; and, John 14:6 solidifies this means of salvation as the only way for some, not for all, because these Bible verses are really subjective and relative. Emphatically, postmodernism is contradictory and incongruous to objective truth; however, evangelical pastors are not proclaiming "one truth among many, about one savior among many, through one gospel among many."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> James P. Moreland, "Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and the Postmodern Turn," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no.1 (March 2005): 67.

Though this rationale seems extreme, it effectively warns pastors to consider what is at risk if a compromise is withheld. Unfortunately, many are attempting to reach postmodernists through compromise. Their rhetoric clearly states they have and will not compromise the gospel; they argue that simply their means of sharing the gospel is different. Furthermore, some go so far as to refer to anyone who does not sense the need to change ministry philosophies as advocates of ministry techniques for the modern era.<sup>36</sup> In contrast, this writer believes biblical means, regardless of the era or culture, is what God expects; hence, "Doing God's work God's way requires an unwavering commitment to feeding God's people God's Word through relentless biblical preaching and teaching."<sup>37</sup> Love of this world and conforming to the world's standards are evil (I John 2:15, Rom. 12:1-2). Certainly, the Apostle Paul's example of refuting a heretical doctrine in Greek culture, as Luke records in Acts 17:22-34, suggests one should engage the culture and clarify for the postmodernist the validity of objective truth.<sup>38</sup>

In summary, evangelical pastors should not embrace deconstructionist's tenets. Historical-grammatical hermeneutical principles should not be replaced. Furthermore, any attempt to compromise has to be thoroughly scrutinized and such an agreement should not occur at the expense of biblical integrity and the mandate to preach the whole

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<sup>36</sup> Elmer L. Towns and Ed Stetzer, *Perimeter of Light: Biblical Boundaries for the Emerging Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2004), 161.

<sup>37</sup> Steven J. Lawson, *Famine in the Land: A Passionate Call for Expository Preaching* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 27.

<sup>38</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* in Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 572-573.

counsel of God.<sup>39</sup> Equally as important is the need to preach the prophetic passages regardless of the negative expressions they contain.

### Complexity of Prophetic Passages

Admittedly the Minor Prophets are harder to comprehend than many of the New Testament books. God's direct concession and dialogue with Israel does make understanding the prophetic books a more intense homiletical task; thus, preaching and articulating applicable biblical concepts to contemporary congregants from the Minor Prophets require an increased amount of effort in contrast to preaching from the New Testament. Furthermore, eschatological implications within the Minor Prophets increase the complexity of the task and decrease the probability of pastors preaching from the Minor Prophets.

Though the Minor Prophets are harder to comprehend and require a lot more effort, these concerns should not hinder or prohibit one's use of the Minor Prophets. In response to this assertion there are at least four remedies that suggest the difficulty of comprehending the Old Testament can be resolved. In broad terms, the four remedies are: prioritized ministry philosophy, passion versus laziness syndrome, resourcefulness and hermeneutical and theological depth. Perhaps, understanding and embracing these remedies will enhance one's knowledge, zeal and effectiveness in ministry as well as instill within the expositor the confidence to preach from the Minor Prophets or any other book in the Bible.

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<sup>39</sup> Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty- First Century Listeners* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 11.

In light of a prioritized ministry philosophy, first and foremost pastors must determine that pleasing God is of utmost importance. Given his desire to grow the church and congregants' desire to be nourished with simple and personal issue oriented messages, pastors are confronted with determining what they are going to preach. Theoretically, they are simultaneously challenged to decide in their choice of biblical text who they are going to please. In fact, one writer fervently states, "Tragically, many pastors today are catering to their people, sometimes under the guise of reaching lost people, rather than catering to them with the steak of Scripture. Pastors must avoid this well-intentioned but misdirected trend. They must focus on filling the pulpit, not the building."<sup>40</sup> In addition to pleasing God, it is essential for pastors to place the proper emphasis on the time necessary to prepare to preach as well as the time to resolve the tough theological and exegetical concerns.<sup>41</sup> The time to effectively resolve those issues is not Saturday night or Sunday morning. Perhaps, placing preparation to preach ahead of every ministerial duty, including church administration and social calls, will ensure ample time exist to resolve the meaning and appropriate application of a passage. In fact, one expositor argues from 1 Tim. 4:13 and 2 Tim. 4:2-3 that before Timothy "gave attention to anything, he must devote himself to preaching."<sup>42</sup>

Conceivably, pastors endure periods where the ministry is not exciting or one becomes bored or lazy. Though boredom nor laziness is acceptable, both will hinder one's effectiveness as a pastor and one's decision to preach the Minor Prophets.<sup>43</sup> These

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<sup>40</sup> Steven J. Lawson, 45.

<sup>41</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 243.

<sup>42</sup> Steven J. Lawson, 108-110.

<sup>43</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 244.

root causes are uniquely associated with one's choice of text and style of preaching. Such as, one chooses to preach a topical message from the New Testament, because it requires less effort to interpret and preach. As a result, one has to find a way to replace laziness and boredom with passion and enthusiasm. Prayer, a desire to grow spiritually, a desire to grow in one's knowledge of the Bible, a reflection of one's call and a vital devotional and study time, though not definitive, should help.<sup>44</sup> In a similar manner, Sumner Wemp recommends meditation on the Word of God, music, "seeking the power of God", immersing your mind in the Word of God to avoid idleness and "keep your heart perfect before Him".<sup>45</sup>

Given comprehending prophetic passages with eschatological implications involve a systematic and theological system, it seems reasonable to conclude one has to be determined to accept the rigor of study (2 Tim. 2:15). Fortunately, the tools and helps available for interpreting and preaching Old Testament prophetic books are impressive. Similarly, books about systematic theology, Old Testament Theology, eschatology, literary genres in the Old Testament, hermeneutics and preaching from the Old Testament are innumerable. Pastors can take online seminary courses, attend seminars on preaching or enroll in correspondence courses. Sermons or series on certain books of the Bible can be purchased or downloaded from certain churches or schools. For example, S. Lewis Johnson's, a distinguished professor of Dallas Theological Seminary, sermons on the Minor Prophets are online; John Walvoord's, an esteemed theologian and historic advocate of premillennial and dispensational theology, messages or lessons on certain

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<sup>44</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 239-242 and Steven J. Lawson, 116-120.

<sup>45</sup> C. Sumner Wemp, *The Guide to Practical Pastoring* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982), 266-268.



eschatological topics are available at Dallas Theological Seminary as well as many other professors' exposition of the Minor Prophets; and a well-known Southern Baptist expositor, W. A. Criswell, sermons are available at First Baptist Church, Dallas. In light of the hope that pastors will preach more often from the Old Testament and the impact of the resources available, Walter Kaiser writes, "There is great hope as a whole new series of helps are now being made available."<sup>46</sup>

Oddly, aside from the proximity of the advent of Christ and maybe the authentic use of the gift of prophecy, Christians and pastors today have an enormous advantage on New Testament believers. Contemporary pastors have access to a plethora of conservative published works on interpreting the Bible. In contrast, New Testament Christians do not, yet Paul taught them about end time events. Interestingly, the church at Thessalonica, where Paul may have spent as little as two weeks, are taught and exposed to end times concepts; concepts that are found in the Old Testament Scriptures. Furthermore, Paul thoroughly elaborates upon God's plan and purpose for Israel and the Gentile nations as he writes to the church at Rome (Rom. 9:1 - 11:36). Indeed, the New Testament writers' prove how invaluable it is to understand the Old Testament prophetic passages.

Lastly, one has to embrace the importance of going beyond the basics of understanding hermeneutical and theological concepts. Perhaps, the pastor who is a novice and desires to remain a novice will not find comfort and ease with explaining the historical and theological issues in the Minor Prophets. Yet that is what pastors are called to do; it is his task to "dig into the Bible passage, to research answers to tough questions, and to devise effective ways of communicating complicated aspects of biblical truth to

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<sup>46</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament*, 47.

his people.”<sup>47</sup> Even Hebrew converts in the New Testament are expected to go beyond just understanding repentance from dead works, baptism, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment (Heb. 5:5 - 6:3). The writer of Hebrews senses explaining the priesthood of Christ in light of the priesthood of Melchizedek is hard for one not interested in Old Testament history or growing spiritually (Heb. 5:11-12). Conclusively, this declaration for growing spiritually and in one’s knowledge of God, suggests congregants are to desire an understanding of the weightier issues in the Bible as well as pastors are to be capable of explaining complex Old Testament prophetic passages.

In brief, eschatological implications in the Minor Prophets add to the complexity of interpreting and preaching the Minor Prophets. Nevertheless, despite the issues that may arise, pastors who purposefully invest the time required, appropriate the resources available, vigorously struggle to understand the complex and determine foremost to glorify God in preaching the whole counsel of God, will preach proportionately from the Minor Prophets.

### Preaching the Old Opposed to the New Testament

As is suggested in this project, the Old Testament is neglected in favor of the New Testament, because pastors are looking for simple text to preach and text that is relevant to contemporary congregants. These two concerns are addressed separately in other sections of the paper. All the same, in concert with these concerns, it is important to understand the value and continuity of the Old Testament alongside the New Testament. Unequivocally, the Old Testament, including the Minor Prophets, is equally as important

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<sup>47</sup> Stephen N. Rummage, 83.

as the New Testament; therefore, the Minor Prophets should be preached in proportion to pastors preaching from any other book in the Bible.

Though one writer senses the solution to the problem is immersion into all of the Scriptures devotionally, for personal spiritual growth as well as in preparation to preach, it seems unbiblical for this equally inspired testament to suffer such demeaning criticism.<sup>48</sup> In spite of the speculative and destructive principles that led to this belittling demeanor, Walter Kaiser effectively clarifies the value of the Old Testament and its equality and complementary nature alongside the New Testament; he asserts:

- Both testaments are a part of “one continuing, unified plan of God.”
- “Grasping some sense of the wholeness of God’s plan will make it easier to teach and preach the individual parts of this totality in the Old Testament.”
- In light of biblical theology in both testaments, “A misstep in this testament”, the Old Testament, “often means a misstep down the line in theology in practice of the faith.”
- “While the words and events that are recorded in the Old Testament are not directed to the church or anyone else in later times, these same words and events did prepare the ground for Christ’s coming and His real revelation that came in the message of the New Testament.”
- The prophets wrote about the Messiah. “They knew they were speaking about the Messiah. They knew Messiah must suffer. They knew Messiah would also be glorified and triumph.”
- Many doctrines “come to their fullest expression in the Old Testament.”
- Though the New Testament does not address certain ethical issues, it presumes knowledge and application of the Old Testament.<sup>49</sup>

Consequently, the essentiality and value of the Old Testament as well as the Minor Prophets is evident in its assertion, which solidifies the completeness and wholeness of the Bible, the nature and advent of Christ and other doctrines. In fact, John Sailhamer

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<sup>48</sup> Scott M. Gibson, 25.

<sup>49</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament*, 29-45.

suggests the value of the Old Testament is unavoidable if one seriously reads and understands it; he writes,

From such a vantage point there is considerable agreement between what it means to preach from the prophets and to preach from the New Testament. Most importantly both turn on the foci that form the basis of a Christian theology: covenant blessing, faith, and law, to mention only three. This suggests that by the time of the completion of the Old Testament Canon (Tanakh), many or all of the central New Testament themes had already played themselves out in full measure within the books of the Old Testament themselves.<sup>50</sup>

In summary, many pastors favor preaching the New Testament, because it is easier to preach. Despite the ease of preaching, the value of the Old Testament along with the continuity of the Old in relation to the New Testament, suggests it is essential for converts of all ages. Furthermore, to fully understand the New Testament and to find biblical solutions to certain ethical issues, pastors must preach the Old Testament which includes the Minor Prophets.

### **Conclusion**

Assuming responsibility for the present state of the moral fiber in America, the lack of sound biblical preaching and as this project suggests the lack of preaching from the Minor Prophets, it is indispensable for pastors to respond in a god fearing way.

According to Walter Kaiser:

Such a scarcity of God's Word would be a sign of God's judgment on his people and their leaders who had helped to create this barrenness. It would represent a setting similar to those horrible words found in Amos 8:11-12:

"The days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD, "when I will send a famine through the land - not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Scott M. Gibson, 116.

<sup>51</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament, 19.

Certainly, if the regularity of preaching the Minor Prophets is going to be increased, pastors must resolve to please God rather than man, declare, unapologetically, God, the Bible and the gospel are objective truths, engage the culture rather than being influenced by it and embrace sound biblical exposition in fulfillment of the mandate to preach the whole counsel of God. Furthermore, negativism, desire for simplicity and lack of resourcefulness should not hinder one's preaching. Instead, one should purposefully determine to preach proportionately through certain books in the Minor Prophets.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Substantiation of the Minor Prophets' Applicability to the 21st Century Church**

Defending the thesis that the Minor Prophets are applicable to contemporary congregants is the objective of this chapter. At the outset, effort will be placed upon grasping the general teachings of three of the Minor Prophets. As each book is discussed a number of ideas will be developed to articulate and prove the applicability of the Minor Prophets. For example, though the book of Joel will not be discussed, one discussion could involve reflecting upon the crucial need for an "Invigorating Prophetic Call for National Repentance in America"; the sermon text would be Joel 2:12-17. Similarly, this chapter will prove the Minor Prophets' applicability by identifying within the Minor Prophets and articulating certain concepts relating to the ten basic Bible doctrines. In fact, considerable emphasis will be placed on the doctrine of end times, because of its impact upon the lack of preaching from the Minor Prophets.

#### **Relevant Issues in Amos**

The book of Amos is written by the prophet Amos, who identifies himself as the author in Amos 1:1. The name "Amos" means "burden" or "burden-bearer"; it seems to denote lifting or carrying a burden. Perhaps, the force or weight of Amos' message is associated with his name; perceivably, as Irving Jensen suggests, the danger and poverty stricken life in Tekoa as well as Amos' discipline and hardness prepared him to deliver God's hard and severe message to Israel.<sup>1</sup> The lack of information about Amos' ancestors

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<sup>1</sup> Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 404-405.

may imply he comes from a common or poor family. Unlike most prophets, Amos clarifies that he is not a prophet, a son of a prophet nor did he make his living as a prophet (Amos 7:14-15). Rather his occupations are “shepherd” and “a grower of sycamore figs” (Amos 1:1, 7:14). Amos marks the dating of his writings by identifying two Kings, Uzziah and Jeroboam II, and a seemingly well-known earthquake (Amos 1:1). King Uzziah, the king of Judah, reigns from 790 to 739 BC and Jeroboam II reigns from 793 to 753 BC.<sup>2</sup> Though one cannot be certain about the date of the earthquake, some scholars cite archaeological evidence of an earthquake dating about 760 BC.<sup>3</sup> Given the timing of the earthquake is not definite, it seems plausible that Amos wrote this book between 790 and 755 BC.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the fact that many Gentile nations and Judah are mentioned in this book, Amos primarily addresses the Northern Kingdom (Amos 3:1; 5:1). In light of understanding the purpose for his prophetic messages, Norman Geisler suggests three broad themes. First, the book of Amos historically addresses Israel’s need to repent; theologically, it reveals Israel’s disregard for the Law; and Christologically, it predicts God’s plan to restore the nation after sustaining a cataclysmic judgment.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, Amos delivers a message of judgment in the midst of prosperous and peaceful times;

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<sup>2</sup> Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 275-278, 283-285.

<sup>3</sup> Robert B. Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 377.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas J. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah* In The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 106-107.

<sup>5</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 238.

also, Israel and Judah both have strong militaries.<sup>6</sup> King Uzziah's life, military success, construction and improvements of Judah's weaponry are recorded in 2 Chronicles 26. Three times King Uzziah is spoken of in stalwart and influential terms; however, in his last days, King Uzziah suffers leprosy and isolation "from the house of the Lord", because of his pride and presumptuous behavior (2 Chron. 26:5, 8, 15, 16-24). Similarly, Jeroboam II increases or solidifies the borders of Israel in the midst of weakened Syria, Assyria, Damascus and Egypt; therefore, during the prophetic ministry of Amos, Israel is quite influential in the Mediterranean region.<sup>7</sup>

Conceivably, this brief introduction to the book of Amos provokes one to further consider its relevance to contemporary congregants. In that regard, three crucial issues seem to emerge, injustice, chastisement and inconsistent spiritual lives. Initially, the matter of injustice, one of the most compelling issues in the book of Amos, is worth examining to substantiate its applicability to believers today. Amos 5:24, a very familiar passage heralded by Martin Luther King Jr., is possibly the most poetic passage in the book about justice; however, most of the book and most importantly the chapters preceding Amos 5:24 are inundated with incidents involving injustice.<sup>8</sup> Characteristically, pride and greed describes Gaza, Tyre and many other cities who are charged with participating in slave trade (Amos 1:6-10). Edom pursues and attacks Israel, which as the battles are fought she shows no pity (Amos 1:11-12). Ammon out of desire for additional territory expresses cruelty by ripping open the women of Gilead (Amos 1:12-15). Also, Israel in Amos 2:6 is charged with selling "the righteous for

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<sup>6</sup> Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 86.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas J. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, 107-109.

<sup>8</sup> Craig Loscalzo, "Preaching Themes from Amos" *Review and Expositor* 92, no.2 (Spring 1995): 199.



silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals." Equally as heinous, the rich, self-indulgent and licentious women of Samaria are singled out for oppressing the poor (Amos 3:9-4:3).

As one may deduce, many of these incidents primarily relate to nations fighting against one another; however, the inhumane acts, cruelty, greed and desire for territorial influence and power are intimately related to injustice. In contrast, Thomas Finley's impressive exegetical study of four words further amplifies the cruel oppression and injustices of Amos' day. The four words are "innocent" and "poor" in Amos 2:6 and 5:1, "needy" in Amos 2:7, 4:1, 5:11 as well as 8:6 and "afflicted" in Amos 2:7 and 8:4.

Ultimately, the following conclusions are drawn:

- The word "innocent", though translated "righteous" in some English translations, signifies the oppressed are not guilty of crime; rather the oppressed are victims.
- "Poor" along with the word "innocent" imply the oppressed are poor people in need of "money, power" and legal representation; therefore, without it they are victims of the rich.
- The word "needy" reflects a different Hebrew word which also denotes a person in need; however, this term is often used to draw attention to the different classes of people; thus, it highlights the advantages of the rich and the disadvantages of the "have-nots".
- "Afflicted" when used in association with the poor denotes suffering that may involve hunger, being homeless or widowed.
- In summary, "Amos depicts a class of people in Israel who lack any share in the wealth of the kingdom of Jeroboam II, who lack the basic necessities of life and who are suffering as innocent victims."<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, as Amos 5:21-24 advocates, an abundance of justice is essential for one to be righteous and truly worship God. In applicable terms, it is impossible for one to authentically worship God, while oppressing and taking advantage of the poor.

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas J. Finley, "An Evangelical Response to the Preaching of Amos" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 28, no. 4 (December 1985): 414-415.

Instead, as in Amos' day, true believers should feed, serve and defend the poor. Far from being an isolated case, the Christian Coalition of Alabama defends the rich against the governor's call for Christians to support the poor; although the rich pay less in taxes proportionately, the Christian Coalition of Alabama offers a passive and "greed-motivated" response in disagreement with a bill to improve schools.<sup>10</sup> Regrettably, passive injustices are prevalent among evangelicals.

Possibly, the dynamic of justice that Israel fails to embrace is something evangelicals in America should explore. Namely, God the Father is just and He expects His followers to be just. In addition, the phrase "run down like water" in Amos 5:24 implies justice and righteousness should be plentiful and constant.<sup>11</sup> If not, God the Father will defend and avenge the oppressed and unfortunate. Unmistakably, believers today, especially those who passively or actively support or participate in gross injustices, could significantly benefit from observing and applying the spiritual principles evident in God's reprimand of Israel.

Similarly, God's chastisement of the nation of Israel is markedly relevant to America in the 21st Century. After describing Israel's oppression of the poor, licentiousness, luxurious lifestyle, worship of idols and insincere worship of God, God charges Israel to "Prepare to meet your God" (Amos 4:1-5, 12). Deplorably, Israel faces the judgment of God because she abuses His mercy and rejects His chastisement. Five times in Amos 4:6-11, God uses the phrase "Yet you have not returned to me". In every occurrence, this phrase concludes an instance of God's chastisement of Israel. For example, in Amos 4:6

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<sup>10</sup> Glen H. Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount: A Practical Hope for Grace and Deliverance* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 55.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas E. McComiskey, ed., *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 432-433.

God causes Israel to experience a lack of food with the objective of drawing her back to Him; however, she refuses to repent. Incidentally, unemployment, loss of life for a number of reasons, drought, floods, tornadoes and hurricanes in America are unusually similar to the kinds of things God uses to discipline Israel (Amos 4:7-11). Furthermore, though Amos 4 refers to a national concern, this chapter along with Hebrews 12:3-11 reminds every believer of the importance and purpose of God's chastisement.

Graphically, the vision of the plumb line in Amos 7:7-9 is symbolic of inconsistent spirituality, national and personal spiritual demises, evident in both Amos' day as well as contemporary America. As this vision illustrates, the palpable extent of God's patience with a nation who relentlessly refuses to repent is worth noting. In fact, these verses should compel America, its political and spiritual leaders and the Christians who inhabit this nation to evaluate whether its principles and practices are in line with God's Word. Amos warns Israel that God's patience is depleted, His judgment is imminent and everyone whose actions are not consistent with God's standards will be destroyed.<sup>12</sup> Insightfully, one notes, "Every generation should behold the plumb line set in its midst, the absolute standard given of God by which humanity is held accountable."<sup>13</sup> Reminiscent of Amos' day, the standards of God in America are disregarded as it relates to the well being of poor people, corrupt financial practices and senseless depravity among clergy.

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<sup>12</sup> Charles L. Feinberg, 113.

<sup>13</sup> Roy L. Honeycutt, *Amos and His Message: An Expository Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1963), 131.

In summary, "no one can ponder the prophecies of Amos without discovering how directly they bear upon the problems of our modern world."<sup>14</sup> In fact, as one writer effectively notes, "the church's neglect of Amos might be understandable if we lived in a world of little injustice, little poverty and little misuse of wealth - or even if we lived in a world in which the conditions Amos speaks of were recognized but were gradually being righted."<sup>15</sup> As the conditions are not improving and in some cases are getting worse, the church in the 21st Century would greatly benefit from a sound exposition and spirit-filled proclamation of the book of Amos.

### **Relevant Issues in Malachi**

The book of Malachi is named after the prophet; his name means "my messenger".<sup>16</sup> A careful reading of the book of Malachi indicates he is a god-fearing prophet, who prophesies against Israel's gross negligence in worshipping God and their failure to obey the commands of the covenant. Though Malachi seems to be the last prophetic voice until the coming of John the Baptist, there is no evidence of his ancestors or life; in fact, the prophet Malachi is not mentioned in the books of Ezra or Nehemiah or any other book in the Old Testament; however, it is rather clear that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah provide an appropriate background for understanding the book of Malachi.<sup>17</sup> In close affinity to Ezra and Nehemiah, the presence of temple worship suggests the

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<sup>14</sup> Raymond Calkins, *The Modern Message of the Minor Prophets* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), 24.

<sup>15</sup> James M. Boice, *The Minor Prophets: An Expositional Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 133.

<sup>16</sup> Charles L. Feinberg, 249.

<sup>17</sup> Leon J. Wood, 373-377.

completion of rebuilding the temple.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, marriage to foreigners, social injustice and Israel's disregard for paying tithes associate Malachi with these books and suggest the book is written after 430 BC (Mal. 2:11; Ezra 9-10; Neh. 13:23-27; Mal 3:5; Neh. 5:1-13; Mal. 3:8-10; Neh. 13:10-14).<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the temple and surrounding wall is complete. The priests are actively pursuing their duties in the temple area. The Israelites are living in the city of Jerusalem despite the fact that they are under Persian control. Unfortunately, rather than embracing their relationship with God, who sets them free from Babylon's domination, brings them back into the land and rebuilds the city of Jerusalem, they are insensitive, commit atrocious sins and display contempt for authentic worship.

Seemingly, a revival of genuine worship is one of the key themes in the book of Malachi. Consider the following propositions:

- The priests despise the name of God (Mal. 1:6)
- The priests offer defiled, lame or sick, sacrifices on the altar (Mal. 1:7-8)
- The priests consider the table of the Lord contemptible (Mal. 1:7)
- Their worship is so insincere and impure, God asks for someone to shut the doors (Mal. 1:10)
- Israel's attitude toward worship is reprehensible; they mock it and instead of joy it makes them weary and bored (Mal. 1:13)
- Though they are living in sin, many deceptively come to the altar weeping (Mal 2:13)
- They are known for much hypocritical talk (Mal. 2:17)
- The Israelites are guilty of not paying tithes (Mal. 3:8)

Certainly, churches today need to be reminded of what constitutes true worship. No amount of innovation, whether it comes in the form of video, art, contemporary music or drama, can take the place of true worship. As Vaughan Roberts suggests, true "worship

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<sup>18</sup> Leon J. Wood, 373-377.

<sup>19</sup> Robert B. Chisholm, 477.

concerns the whole of life."<sup>20</sup> Perhaps, Vaughan Roberts' understanding of true worship is corollary to the theme of insincere worship; thus, one's relationship with God, obedience to His word and more specifically the law and covenantal agreements and one's relationship with others are essential to true and genuine worship.<sup>21</sup> Oddly, 400 years prior to the time of Christ, during His earthly ministry and in contemporary society there is an immense need for true worship. Malachi identifies the practices and attitudes of the priests and the people, which God describes as defiled, irreverent and haughty. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus describes the worship of the Pharisees and Scribes as insincere, hypocritical and useless (Matt. 6:1-16). In light of contemporary worship, one writer notes, "We must become more authentic in the profession of our lips, in the use of our gifts, in the investment of our service and in the use of our time."<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, Malachi's instruction about divorces is worth preaching to contemporary congregants. Generally, the matter of divorce in Malachi's day involves Israelite men divorcing their Israelite wives for foreign women; however, it is important to consider the specific details Malachi identifies. In Malachi 2:10-16, requesting a divorce is considered unjust; hence, to "deal treacherously" with the wife of their youth involves divorcing one's wife without an appropriate rationale and for the sake of fulfilling one's own evil desires (Mal. 2:10-11). The act itself is considered profane, an abomination and disrespectful of the covenant of the fathers with God the Father (Mal. 2:10-11). The institution of marriage is considered holy (Mal 2:11). Also, God through

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<sup>20</sup> Vaughan Roberts, *True Worship* (Waynesboro: Authentic Media, 2006), 16.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-26.

<sup>22</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* in *The Preacher's Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992), 473.

the institution and consummation of the marriage makes the man and woman one (Mal. 2:15). His purpose for making them one in the marriage is related to the couple raising a godly offspring (Mal 2:15). "He hates divorce". In fact, God declares He would be the witness or the one testifying against the husband who divorces his wife; and the husband will not be able to deny the act nor his motives for doing it (Mal. 2:12, 14).

At a time when innumerable Christian marriages are failing, the number of single parent settings is growing; cataclysmic disruptions in homes as a result of a divorce as well as a number of other negative factors suggest the church needs to hear the message of Malachi. The church needs to hear that God loves marriage and hates divorce, which in Mal. 2:16 God explicitly says it. The statement "The Lord's holy *institution* which He loves" in Mal. 2:11 implies marriage is a holy institution. Furthermore, intermarrying with a foreigner seems to correlate with Paul's teachings concerning Christians marrying unbelievers; consequently, the results are the same; thus, covenant people in Malachi's day and Christians today are subject to idol worship, inattention to the ways of God and turbulence in the home (Deut 7:3-4, 1 Cor. 7:12-16, 2 Cor. 6:11-18).

Most importantly, Malachi reminds both men and women in our narcissistic culture, one is not permitted to divorce his or her mate for any reason. The phrase "deal treacherously" is translated "faithless to one another" in the New Revised Standard version. As a result, in this context unfaithfulness refers primarily to divorcing the wife of one's youth for a foreigner. One writer suggests the root causes may have been political gain or simply sexual attraction, but God determines it to be a spiritual matter.<sup>23</sup> At any rate, contemporary congregants must acknowledge that unfaithfulness of any sort

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<sup>23</sup> Iain M. Duguid, *A Study Commentary on Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* (Carlisle: Evangelical Press Books, 2010), 214-216.

as it pertains to marriage is unacceptable. Similarly, couples need to embrace God's purpose for making them one; He expects them to raise their children to become Christians. Indeed, no one wins in a divorce, but the children are certainly subject to suffer and may be greatly neglected in the process. In summary, "Malachi's lofty view of marriage deserves careful consideration in a society where pre- and post-nuptial agreements and 'no-fault' divorce have made a mockery of the traditional wedding 'vows;'" thus, he "calls attention to the central characteristic of the marriage relationship - faithfulness."<sup>24</sup>

Another issue relevant to contemporary congregants is addressed in Mal. 3:6-12, giving and its relation to true worship and reciprocal blessings from God. Unfortunately, the two false attitudes among contemporaries are essential in this dialogue. First, evangelicals should be careful not to dogmatically demand a tenth of one's earnings be given to the church. A meticulous study of this passage suggests tithes and offerings in this context involve a covenantal agreement between God and the Israelites (Mal. 3:7). Furthermore, it seems plausible that if one teaches from this passage Christians are to give a tenth; one should also teach if Christians do not give a tenth they are under a curse (Mal. 3:9; Deut. 28). Secondly, the false attitudes and extreme perspectives of some evangelicals, who teach that if one pays tithes, gives above and beyond the tithe or yields to a number of other money siphoning gimmicks God is going to open up the windows of heaven is worth discussing. Truthfully, in a general sense, "God meets with blessing the heart wholly devoted to him."<sup>25</sup> Yet, "one must be careful in applying these promises to

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<sup>24</sup> Richard D. Patterson, Andrew Hill and Philip W. Comfort. *Minor Prophets: Hosea-Malachi* In Cornerstone Biblical Commentary (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 629.

<sup>25</sup> Charles L. Feinberg, 263.



believers today. The Mosaic covenant, with its promises of material blessings to Israel for her obedience, is no longer in force (Eph. 2:14-15; Rom. 10:4; Heb 8:13)."<sup>26</sup>

Despite these gross applications of the Scripture, Mal. 3:6-12 sheds light on the need for contemporary Christians, personally, as a church and nationally, to evaluate their giving with the overarching objective of making the moral and spiritual changes to sustain a vibrant relationship with God. The current economical crisis in America and the national decline in honoring God are redolent of Israel's neglect of tithes.

Consequently, an authentic revival in America may provoke God to show mercy to the nation (Mal. 3:7, 9-10). Certainly, a national revival cannot occur without congregants and churches obeying God by wholly giving themselves, their time, money and abilities. As one writer accurately writes, "Malachi understood that turning in spiritual renewal must begin somewhere, and God himself decreed the practical act of obedience to the Mosaic laws regulating the tithe as an important first step in reasserting the community's fidelity in covenant relationship with Yahweh."<sup>27</sup>

In short, "the moral and spiritual conditions of Israel in" Malachi's "day are those of professing Christendom today."<sup>28</sup> Though only three key issues are articulated, it is apparent that the book of Malachi is applicable to the 21st Century Church.

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<sup>26</sup> John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), 1584-1585.

<sup>27</sup> Richard D. Patterson, Andrew Hill and Philip W. Comfort, 635.

<sup>28</sup> Charles L. Feinberg, 249.

### Relevant Issues in Zephaniah

The book of Zephaniah is written by the prophet Zephaniah. Zephaniah is a fourth generation grandson of King Hezekiah (Zeph. 1:1). His ministry takes place during the reign of King Josiah. Similarly, the book of Zephaniah is possibly written prior to the revival or reform that takes place during the reign of King Josiah; though one cannot be certain, this view seems plausible given such direct and forceful words would not be necessary soon after a major reform; further, Zephaniah's silence about the revival in concert with the fact that Judah's rededication appears to be inconsistent with the very haughty and prideful attitude Zephaniah addresses (Zeph. 1:1, 2 Kings 23:1-25, Zeph. 3:1-5).<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the background of Zephaniah's prophecy is directly associated with the evil deeds of King Manasseh and his son, King Amon (2 Kings 21). Cumulatively, in the plan of God the eighth century prophets primarily address the sins of the nation of Israel; as a result, Israel falls at the hand of the Assyrians; as time progresses, the impending judgment of Judah is prophesized by Zephaniah and a number of other seventh century prophets (2 Kings 23:26-27).<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, God the Father through the prophet Zephaniah vehemently and graphically declares unto Judah its destruction and ultimately its restoration. Given this background information the question still remains - Is the prophecy of Zephaniah, a message about destroying and restoring Judah, relevant to contemporary congregants? Indeed, one can relate to the idolatry, apathy, laziness, indifference to sin, national trust in money or the world's economical system and national pride.

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<sup>29</sup> Leon J. Wood, 316-320.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 321.

Reminiscent of Peter Craigie's thoughts, it is of utmost importance that one senses the complacency and indifference Zephaniah addresses, which is apparent in contemporary society; he writes, "it is easier to think of his words addressing the corruption of an ancient world than to let them disturb the unruffled waters of our modern world. But we will fail to grasp the urgency of the prophet's message if we do not let it penetrate the complacency of our century."<sup>31</sup> Zephaniah 1:12 declares God is going to judge those who are complacent in Judah. Unfortunately, the people of Judah conclude it is not imperative to serve God, because He is not going to do anything about how they are living. One writer astutely says, "In their boredom and apathy, the cynical citizens and leaders of Zephaniah's day doubted that God would do either good or bad; He was a paper tiger who frequently threatened, but never did anything."<sup>32</sup> The context of Zephaniah chapter one provokes one to ask, "Is America so insensitive to God that it no longer expects Him to judge sin?" Insightfully, John MacArthur argues:

Our society openly condones and defends the worst kinds of evil. Civilization as we know it has reached the deepest level of corruption and abides under a sentence of divine condemnation. People's consciences have been seared, debased, obstructed, repressed, and overturned. Without a functioning conscience, people are destined only to sink deeper and deeper into wickedness. Humanity is merely storing up wrath against the day of wrath.<sup>33</sup>

Certainly, without much thought a god-fearing Christian has to agree, the influx of both personal and national sins as well as the nonchalant attitudes of Americans signify the need for a sound exposition and application of the principles found in the prophecy of Zephaniah.

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<sup>31</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Twelve Prophets*. Daily Study Bible Series. vol. 2 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), 110.

<sup>32</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, 221.

<sup>33</sup> John F. MacArthur, *The Vanishing Conscience* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1994), 74.

Secondly, as is the case in contemporary America, the book of Zephaniah indirectly suggests Judah's perspective on the success of the nation's economical system is faulty. Zephaniah 1:11 implies the place where goods are sold will be destroyed. Zephaniah 1:13 teaches that the judgment of God involves allowing their goods to be stolen and their farming efforts will be unsuccessful. Similarly, their dependency upon money will not be able to protect them from the judgment of God (Zeph. 1:18). Indubitably, contemporary congregants need to hear that man's trust should be only in God and not money or a nation's economical system. In contrast, to Judah's negligent and prideful behavior, it is only through a nation's relationship with God that its economical system prospers. Certainly, given the instability of America's economical system, the constant fluctuation and increase of the price of goods and services and the innumerable lost jobs and retirement plans, America should consider the vitality of its relationship with God.

Another issue relevant to Christians today is addressed in Zeph. 1:4-6, idolatry. According to 2 Kings 21:3-6, King Manasseh's idolatrous worship is rather substantial. He erects and honors Baal, Asherah and Molech. King Manasseh encourages witchcraft, divination and child sacrifices to pagan idols. Worst of all, he permits and conducts many of these evil practices in the temple. Consequently, God through the prophet Zephaniah ensures Judah He will destroy the city, because of its evil and idolatrous practices. Idolatry in America today is not quite the same as in Zephaniah's day; thus, evangelicals do not worship an image or allow worship of images in the sanctuary. On the contrary, there is much evidence to suggest cultic religions, Islam and eastern religions, such as Buddhism and Wiccan, are growing and in some cases they are

growing much faster than Christianity.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, idolatry in America seems to be impacting the church through silence and tolerance. Though poignant, Erwin Lutzer effectively articulates this concern; he states:

This new tolerance insists that we have no right to disagree with a liberal social agenda; we should not defend our views of morality, religion, and respect for human life. This tolerance respects absurd ideas but will castigate anyone who believes in absolutes or who claims to have found some truth. This tolerance, someone has said, includes every point of view except those points of view that do not include every point of view.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, the idolatry of Zephaniah's day or in contemporary America is not pleasing to God regardless of its form.

In summary, the prophecy of Zephaniah is relevant to congregants in the 21st Century. It teaches congregants today to act respectfully and responsibly towards God, one's relationship with Him and God's unchanging character; thus, God's judgment of Judah's national and personal indifference to sin, corrupt and godless fiduciary practices as well as her persistent evil and idolatrous conduct allude to present troubles.

Indisputably, the present state of moral decadence and the lack of godly political and spiritual leadership in America, Christian leaders, government officials, believers in general and most importantly the lost in America are in urgent need of a reminder of the wrath of God. As Zephaniah graphically depicts, the wrath of God entails an imminent destruction that will involve wreckage and calamity throughout the whole world.

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<sup>34</sup> Keith Krell, "The Scandal of Christianity (John 14:6)," Bible.org. <http://bible.org/seriespage/scandal-christianity-john-146> (accessed 6 January 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Erwin W. Lutzer, *Christ Among Other Gods* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 29.

### **Relevant Eschatological Issues in the Minor Prophets**

The objective of this section of the paper is not to define eschatology, defend a particular theological system or resolve the many issues that arise when studying a passage involving eschatological implications. Rather the aim of this section is to identify certain eschatological concepts in the Minor Prophets. Similarly, its goal is to illustrate the applicability and force of these concepts upon believers today. The major eschatological concepts the Minor Prophets address directly or indirectly are the second coming of Christ, a future judgment of Israel and all the Gentile nations and the restoration of the Davidic Kingdom.

Though fully delineating the colossal and in-depth terminology of the doctrine of eschatology is not the concern of this paper, it is essential to establish a background for understanding this paper's concern. In general terms, the doctrine of eschatology involves a biblical understanding of how God will unfold history as it relates to end times and the final state of all humanity. The final state of all humanity involves the resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous, regardless of one's ethnicity; however, this aspect of eschatology is not a major emphasis in the Minor Prophets. Nonetheless, it involves the judgment of the unrighteous, which results in both soul and body being cast into the lake of fire, a place of torment, for all eternity; and it entails the righteous' entrance into heaven. The Minor Prophets' assertion in this dialogue primarily pertains to unfulfilled prophecy or forthcoming events about the nation of Israel. These events seem to be described as end time events, because they have not occurred yet and their actual occurrence will coincide with the end of the age. Interestingly, while awaiting the occurrence of these events, which is contingent upon Israel's repentance,

God offers salvation to the Gentiles. Concurrently, as God completes His work among the Gentiles, He is going to orchestrate a number of events, which are considered end time events (Dan. 9:24-27). These events will primarily involve Israel, because God's work among the Gentiles, specifically as it pertains to salvation, will be complete (Hosea 2:23, Luke 21:24, Rom. 9-11). Indeed, Christians today can learn much from the Minor Prophets about end times.

First, the Minor Prophets have much to say about a future day of judgment for Israel. This day of judgment in the Bible has been identified as the "day of the Lord", "the time of Jacob's trouble", "the day of the Lord's wrath" or "abomination of desolation" and a number of other designations (Ezek. 30:3, Jer. 30:4-7, Zeph. 1:18, Dan. 9:27). Bible writers predict incomparable destruction and calamity will destroy much of the earth and kill a large percentage of its inhabitant. God's purpose for this day of judgment is to discipline Israel and draw her back to him (Joel 2:12-17). Similarly, God intends to judge the Gentile nations for their mistreatment of Israel and for their rejection of the gospel.<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, the Minor Prophets describe the sinful behavior and attitudes of Israel, which provoke God's immediate judgment, an extensive period of discipline and a future day of judgment.

As many New Testament passages and the Major Prophets seem to be the focus today, it is important to grasp the scope of this eschatological concept in the Minor Prophets. Though almost all the Minor Prophets discuss the day of the Lord, Joel and Zephaniah place the most emphasis on it (Amos 5:18, Amos 9-10, Obad. 15, Zech. 14:1, Mic. 4:6-8). For example, after graphically depicting unparalleled devastation and disaster,

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<sup>36</sup>J. Dwight Pentecost, *Prophecy for Today: God's Purpose and Plan for the Future* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1989), 53.

Joel 2:11 says, "The LORD gives voice before His army, For His camp is very great; For strong *is the One* who executes His word. For the day of the LORD *is* great and very terrible; Who can endure it?" In similar language Zephaniah 1:14-16 says:

The great day of the LORD *is* near; *It is* near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter; There the mighty men shall cry out. That day *is* a day of wrath, A day of trouble and distress, A day of devastation and desolation, A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of trumpet and alarm Against the fortified cities And against the high towers.

Though Nahum 1:6 and Malachi 4:5 make similar predictions, Zephaniah unremittingly pronounces judgment against Judah and the nations of the world (Zeph. 2). He predicts man and every kind of animal will be consumed (Zeph. 1:1-3). Priests, worshippers of false gods, princes, the kings' children, merchants, the rich, farmers and every kind of evil doer will suffer judgment (Zeph. 1:4-13). Zephaniah says, "their blood shall be poured out like dust, And their flesh like refuse" (Zeph. 1:17)." Worst of all, every attempt to escape and manipulate one's way out of it will fail (Zeph. 1:18). Fortunately, he predicts a remnant from among the Israelites will be protected and restored in the land (Zeph. 3). As Jesus prophesies, if this period of judgment is not shortened all of humanity would be destroyed (Matt. 24:22).

The applicability of the day of the Lord is crucial to contemporary congregants because, as a premillennial dispensationalist believes, this event will occur immediately after church age believers are raptured. If that is true, the task of the church is to warn and teach the lost about the soon coming judgment. Albeit these prophecies may seem negative, harsh and frightening; however, the truth is that God is going to unleash the most destructive, cataclysmic and unparalleled judgment this world has ever experienced. Furthermore, in this age of increased archaeological findings, preoccupation with science



fiction and simply the infiltration of heresies about end times, the church unmistakably must know and believe the truth about the day of the Lord. Definitely, the evocative messages of Paul to the church at Thessalonica confirm the thesis of this project (1 Thess. 5:1-11, 2 Thess. 2). The timing of God's judgment of Israel is not known, but the message of the Bible for the church age is to avoid this time of judgment. In that regard, preaching from the Minor Prophets is essential, because it will evoke a vivid and horrid time no one will want to experience.

Furthermore, the eschatological passages in the Minor Prophets foretell the second coming of Christ and the restoration of the Davidic Kingdom (Zech. 9:9-10, Zech. 10, Amos 9:11-12). In anticipation of the restoration of the Davidic Kingdom, Acts 1:6 clarifies the Jews' expectancy of the nation being restored. In response to the disciple's question about the timing of the kingdom being restored, Jesus replies, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7). This account prior to the ascension of Christ clarifies a number of factors about the fulfillment of prophetic passages relating to the restoration of the Davidic Kingdom. Along with substantiating the Jews' anticipation, it implies the Kingdom will be restored when Christ returns, the second coming of Christ. Furthermore, it confirms the authenticity of the Minor Prophets and their relevance to future generations.

In view of the force and relevancy of end time events as discussed in the Minor Prophets, Christians in America lack clarity about what they believe. Possibly, their response would vary from curious, not too sure about a literal fulfillment, fully convinced of a literal fulfillment and a number of other rationales. Consequently, a number of events have occurred, which engage the nation and demand that Christians to clarify

God's perspective and intentions. First, Tim Lahaye and Jerry Jenkins wrote a series of books, *Left Behind*, about end time prophecy. These authors' ultimate aim is to capture the attention of "apocalyptic thrill seekers", while presenting a biblical perspective on end time events; this prolific and influential endeavor has resulted in over 80 million copies of these books in print.<sup>37</sup> Also, in a quite heretical manner, *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown engages a similar sector of the culture. Unfortunately, this book is full of errors, which the author draws from the Bible, extra-biblical literature and archaeological findings.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, a sector of the American population is intrigued by apocalyptic literature and may be interested in the ancient text, the Minor Prophets.

Furthermore, discussions about Anti-Semitism suggest understanding eschatological passages in the Minor Prophets is essential. Anti-Semitism, in general, involves discrimination or hostility towards Jews. Today, in a pluralistic and biblically illiterate society, this term has to be redefined for Christians. In that regard, the Minor Prophets have much to say about God's love, discipline, judgment and restoration of Jews. Though the Bible has not changed, the Christian view is often distorted in the midst of the discussion. What does the Bible teach? Namely, Jews and Gentiles can be saved during this age; however, the Jews as a nation rejected Christ (John 1:11, Acts 2:36). Given the Jews have rejected Christ, the Bible teaches until they repent and God restores them, as a nation they are subject to God's judgment and His divine unfolding of history (Hosea 2:23, Rom. 9:24-25). Undeniably, just as certain as the Assyrian invasion and

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<sup>37</sup> Tim Lahaye, "Tim LaHaye's Biography," Tim LaHaye's Ministry, <https://timlahaye.com/shopcontent.asp?type=Biography> (accessed 1/18/2011).

<sup>38</sup> J. B. Hixson, "The Da Vinci Code Phenomenon: A Brief Overview and Response" *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 17, no. 33 (Autumn 2004): 44-48.

Babylonian captivity came to pass, the prophecies of Amos, Malachi, Joel and Zephaniah will come to pass.

Nevertheless, Franklin Graham and others are wrongfully stereotyped as extremists. His comments over the last several years about activities in the Middle East and especially about Islam have not been accepted well.<sup>39</sup> In fact, he has been accused of being Anti-Semitic. Yet it should be clear to Christians that Franklin believes God loves all of humanity; however, many throughout the world are not embracing God's way of living and His only way to eternal life.<sup>40</sup> Historically and prophetically, the Minor Prophets and much of the Bible, as Franklin Graham advocates, Israel and all the nations of the world must recognize Christ, the validity of the gospel and monotheism. Consequently, failure to do so results in God's judgment and heresy; further, the true Christian's responsibility is to share God's love and His message while at the same time sustaining biblical integrity. In fact, a better understanding of the Bible, including eschatological passages in the Minor Prophets, may challenge lost people and compromising Christians to be less abrasive towards biblically sound and committed Christian leaders. No - the Minor Prophets do not define Anti-Semitism; however, they do inform Christians and the lost of God's love, judgment and restoration of Israel.

In a more optimistic manner, the President of the United States during the Persian Gulf War consulted a Christian source. Perhaps, the United States' relationship with Israel, Saddam Hussein's threats of diversion attacks on Israel and simply unprecedented

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<sup>39</sup> David A. Patten and Kathleen Walter, "As America Celebrates Christmas, Rev. Franklin Graham Says Secular 'War' Rages Against Christians," Newsmax.com, [http://www.newsmax.com/Headline/franklin-graham-christmas-secular/2010/12/24/id/380976?s=al&promo\\_code=B5BB-1](http://www.newsmax.com/Headline/franklin-graham-christmas-secular/2010/12/24/id/380976?s=al&promo_code=B5BB-1) (accessed 1/18/2010).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

unrest throughout the Middle East greatly troubled President George Bush. He experienced trouble of such a magnitude that he consulted a book on Bible prophecy. Besides the fact that Billy Graham recommends the book, *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis*, it is probably the most current, profound and biblically written volume in the last century about biblical and Middle Eastern history; this book traces Israel's history from the Old Testament to its present state while presenting a prophetic outlook for the future.<sup>41</sup> Indubitably, world leaders along with its inhabitants are fearful and concerned about the future. Despite the fact that the teachings of the Bible are ridiculed and ignored, the messages of the prophets seem to emerge and demand one's attention.

In short, the Minor Prophets are applicable to contemporary congregants. Likewise, they address many of the world's ideologies, heresies and fears. Therefore, the prophet's ancient and resounding messages are as essential today as they were in the day of Micah, Hosea and Zechariah. Definitely, expounding upon each of the Minor Prophets is of utmost importance, because as the whole counsel of God is understood and believed one can live and testify with certainty of hope in the future.

### **Teaching the Nine Basic Bible Doctrines from the Minor Prophets**

Given the contents of every sermon and lesson directly or indirectly involves one's doctrinal integrity, it is essential for pastors to consider the doctrinal implications apparent in every passage. Similarly, the vitality of doctrinal integrity impacts every believer's application and interpretation of the Bible. In that regard and in support of

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<sup>41</sup> Walvoord Trust, "Biography - John F. Walvoord," Walvoord Trust, [http://www.walvoord.com/author\\_bio.php?author\\_id=1](http://www.walvoord.com/author_bio.php?author_id=1) (accessed 1/18/2011).

delineating the applicability of the Minor Prophets, this section of the paper will briefly identify some of the key aspects of the eight basic Bible doctrines from the Minor Prophets. In light of the enormity of this task, only a minor treatment of each doctrine will be articulated. The eight basic Bible doctrines this section will cover are: theology, christology, pneumatology, bibliology, soteriology, anthropology, hamatology and angelology. Though the doctrine of eschatology is essential in this dialogue, it will not be discussed, because it has been articulated in the previous section.

Considering one's doctrine is foundational to a believer's faith, it is essential for pastors to articulate Bible doctrines. As many of the Bible doctrines are complex and may require a systematic study of the Bible, in practice one has to consider ways of grounding believers in sound teaching. Probably the most practical way, especially in the Minor Prophets, to teach doctrine is to take the time in the midst of a particular narrative to emphasize a broader understanding of a particular doctrine. Today, most doctrines are easier to teach from the New Testament, because of the average believer's familiarity with the New Testament and there seems to be a lot more material available to assist in preparing to teach; however, an excursion in a narrative from the Minor Prophets can solidify the overall teaching of the Bible and reinforce the necessity of the Minor Prophets. For example, "the Spirit of the Lord" upon Micah could lead to a broader discussion about the Holy Spirit's activity in the Old Testament or in the life of Old Testament saints (Mic. 3:8). In addition, one can do a survey of a particular concept in the Minor Prophets. Such as, one of the key attributes of God in the Minor Prophets is that He is just; thus, a survey of the justice of God can be taught from the Minor Prophets. Lastly, one should give attention to the teaching and preaching environment.

Unlike a Sunday morning service, the Sunday evening service, Sunday school class or even a small group setting may be a better place to articulate the details of a particular doctrine. Furthermore, a discipleship training class or a Bible institute class may permit a more in-depth discussion of Bible doctrines.

### Theology

Theology in basic terms refers to the study of God. Malachi 3:6 says, "For I am the Lord, I do not change", which implies God the Father is immutable. As the Minor Prophets entail God's judgment of the nations, God is just (Amos 5:24, Hab. 1:12). The book of Jonah teaches believers that God is merciful and sovereign. Jonah openly admits that God is a "gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness." Furthermore, in the midst of Jonah's rebellion and distress, God provides and takes away the shade, which ultimately reminds Jonah that God is sovereign (Jonah 4:6-8, Hab. 1:6). Habakkuk 1:13 refers to the holiness of God; in view of man's evil acts, Habakkuk says, "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil." Also, Hosea 11:9 states, "For I am God, and not man, The Holy One in your midst." Other passages in the Minor Prophets suggest God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent (Hab. 3:1-10, Amos 4:13; 5:8; 9:2-4, Mic. 1:2-3). Habakkuk 1:12 describes God's existence as everlasting. In contrast, to wooden idols Habakkuk argues God is alive, "in His holy temple" and calls the world to be silent before Him (Hab. 2:19-20, Hosea 1:10). Lastly, in the midst of instructions on how to call upon God in repentance, Hosea says "For in You the fatherless finds mercy"; thus, God is merciful (Hosea 14:1-3).

## Christology

Christology pertains to a study about Christ. Interestingly, the Minor Prophets' primary emphasis is not on the nature and character of Christ, but rather on His future activity in relation to Israel's restoration; however, Micah 5:2 teaches the son is eternal. And in a number of passages the deity of Christ is evident. For example, in Zechariah 12:10 the Lord Jesus Christ, the pierced One, will be mourned by the Israelites. In referring to Himself, God the Father says, "they will look on Me, the one whom they pierced"; thus, the Lord Jesus is God the Father, the one who is pierced. Nevertheless, the Minor Prophets' emphasis seems to be on the first and second advent of Christ. In light of the first advent of Christ, two memorable prophecies in the Minor Prophets are worth noting. First, Micah 5:2 predicts the Lord Jesus would be born in the city of Bethlehem (Luke 2:11). Similarly, Zechariah identifies the price for a worthless shepherd or slave as thirty pieces of silver, which is the same amount Judah accepts to betray the Lord Jesus Christ (Zech. 11:4-17, Matt. 27:3-10, Jer. 32:6-9).

Strikingly, Malachi 3:1-2 describe both the first and second advent of Christ. It states God's messenger "will prepare the way before" Him; indeed, as one correlates this prophecy with its New Testament fulfillment, the messenger is identified as John the Baptist and the One coming or the Messenger of the covenant is the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 11:7-11). Furthermore, the phrase "before Me" in Malachi 3:1, alludes to the deity of Christ, because God is spoken of as the One coming. As the text proceeds, it depicts the same One will come in judgment, which includes an unrelenting appearance; thus, the second coming of Christ is predicted in Malachi 3:2. In a similar manner, Zechariah 9:9-10 predict both the first and second advent; "lowly and riding on a donkey" He makes the

triumphant entry into Jerusalem during the first advent; furthermore, as Zechariah prophesies, the King's reign during the second coming of Christ is characterized by peace and supremacy (John 12:12-15).

In anticipation of Israel's restoration and a son of David reigning upon the throne in Jerusalem forever, Micah predicts the Lord Jesus will "reign over them in Mount Zion" (Mic. 4:7). During that reign He will teach and enforce the Word of God (Mic. 4:3). In addition, the Lord Jesus Christ will be the judge and ruler over the nations (Zech. 9:9). In fact, His reign will be characterized by peace and safety; thus, Micah 4:3 says the nations shall not "learn war anymore"; and Micah 4:4 predicts "no one shall make them afraid" as they sit peacefully in the shade. Though this time of tranquility is ideal for Israel, it will not occur until they repent and return to God. In that regard, Zechariah 13:8-9 depicts the Lord as the one purging and refining the remnant.

### Pneumatology

In the Minor Prophets the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, Pneumatology, seems to convey three aspects of the Holy Spirit's work in the Old Testament. First, the Spirit of God is evident in empowering and equipping the prophets; although few prophets explicitly state they are empowered by Holy Spirit, it is highly probable they are all empowered by the Spirit of God (Mic. 3:8, Zech. 4:6).<sup>42</sup> In fact, Israel's words "Is the Spirit of the Lord restricted", imply the words of the prophets are conveyed by the Spirit of God; however, in this case they want to silence the Spirit of God at work in the prophet Micah, because he predicts judgment rather than something positive (Mic. 2:7).

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<sup>42</sup> Leon J. Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 27, 46-48.



Secondly, God with reflection upon His triune nature reminds Zerubbabel the governor of Judah, Joshua the high priest and the remnant in Judah that His Spirit is with them (Hag. 2:1-5). The triune nature of God is identified by the "Spirit" in Haggai 2:5 being equated with the "Lord of hosts" in Haggai 2:4. Last of all, Joel 2:28-32 predict the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the church and during the tribulation period (Acts 2:17-21). Indeed, the Minor Prophets remind us of the vitality of the empowerment and enablement of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of the preacher and his congregants.

### Bibliology

Moreover, a number of concepts about the doctrine of the Bible, bibliology, can be taught from the Minor Prophets. In fact, the prophetic message intrinsically advocates its authority, authenticity and applicability to its hearers. Deuteronomy 18:18-23 clarify the way to validate the prophetic message; accordingly, the prophetic message is not from God if it is not fulfilled. In that regard, many of the Minor Prophets' messages are quoted in the New Testament and an explicit reference may be made to suggest prophecy is being fulfilled (Matt. 2:15, Mark 14:27, John 19:37). In one instance, the Lord Jesus Christ declares a specific passage is "Scripture"; hence John 7:42 defends the actual place of Christ's birth by distinctively referring to the prophetic Word as "Scripture". Furthermore, it seems as though the transmission of the prophetic Word is superintended by the Lord Jesus Christ. Zechariah chapter one depicts the Lord Jesus Christ as the angel of the Lord, who reveals the vision God gives to the prophet Zechariah. Markedly, Zechariah 1:14 states, "So the angel who spoke with me said to me, 'Proclaim, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'I am zealous for Jerusalem And for Zion with great

zeal." First, this verse reveals that God in the presence of the Angel of the Lord uses an angel to instruct the prophet on what to say. Secondly, it reaffirms the authenticity of the message by using a preparatory prophetic introduction, "Thus says the Lord of hosts". Indubitably, the plethora of prophetic fulfillments in the New Testaments and the Trinity's involvement attest to the trustworthiness of the Minor Prophets, which every believer has to be taught to embrace.

### Soteriology

Despite the lack of explicit explanations about salvation for church age believers, the Minor Prophets do cover issues involving the doctrine of salvation, soteriology. First, the prefiguring of the atoning work of Christ is evident in contexts involving the duties of the priest: thus, the atoning work of the priests affirms the necessity of the once and for all shedding of Christ's blood as the atonement for all sins (Heb. 7:26-27). Similarly, Jonah 2:10 and Joel 2:32 seem to use New Testament salvation language, but the actual context suggests being delivered from present trouble. For example, explicit language like, "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" in Joel 2:32 alludes to one calling upon God for deliverance from trouble; however, in Romans 10:13, it directly relates to calling upon God for salvation. Perhaps, such a statement in concert with Old Testament history clarifies the Israelite's covenantal understanding of salvation, their concern about deliverance from present troubles as well as their emphasis on the Davidic Kingdom's restoration.

Nevertheless, at least one statement is made in the Minor Prophets, which solidifies the basis of salvation for all as well as the necessity of faith in one's relationship with

God. This statement is found in Habakkuk 2:4; it says, "the just shall live by faith." Judah's immediate concerns in that context are deliverance from Babylon and restoration of the Davidic Kingdom. While suffering in Babylon, the Israelites complain to God, because in their estimation the unrighteous are unfit to be used to judge Judah (Hab. 1:12-17). God responds by saying, "the just shall live by faith". At the outset, this statement seems to only mean, trust God He will help you through this time of struggling; however, Paul quotes this passage twice in explaining salvation for those who believe one has to obey the Mosaic Law to be saved (Rom. 1:17, Gal. 3:11-12). Consequently, as Paul concludes, this statement clarifies the basis of salvation and the necessity of faith in God throughout the life of a believer. Indeed, everyone is saved by faith in God.

### Anthropology & Harmatology

The doctrines of man and sin, anthropology and harmatology respectively, primarily center on specific sins, which at times in Old Testament history certain sins are insidious and pervasive. Unlike most of the Bible, the Minor Prophets primarily convey God's judgment of Israel or Judah, which ultimately reflects a person or nation's relationship with God (Hosea 12:2). Though the origin of man and sin are not thoroughly discussed, these prophetic books seem to accept or assume its recipients believe in creationism and the fall of man (Mal. 2:10). Despite the lack of an elaborate discussion about the depraved sin nature, the Minor Prophets highlight the many gross sins humanity of every era has experienced. Witchcraft, sexual immorality, idolatry, greed, pride, lying, slave trade, prostitution, materialism, drunkenness, injustice and hypocrisy are palpable in the Minor Prophets (Zech. 8:17, 10:2, Obad. 1:3, Joel 1:5, Amos 2:6; 4:1; 6:1, Zeph.

2:10, Mic. 7:3-4). In fact, the emotions, uncontrolled lusts and even depression are addressed in the Minor Prophets (Amos. 1:11, Hosea 4:8, Mic. 7:1). Many of the sinful acts are quite indecent and inhuman; certainly, cutting open the stomach of a pregnant woman or a father and son having sex with the same woman in the temple are atrocious acts (Amos 1:13; 2:7-8).

### Angelology

Angelology is the study of both good and evil angels. As it pertains to the Minor Prophets, there are at least four crucial aspects that can be preached or taught. Those characteristics are: appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ in the form of an angel, angels' involvement with revealing the prophetic Word, the angels' duties as servants and messengers and the person and character of Satan. At the outset, Hosea 12:2-6 speaks of the "Angel of the Lord" wrestling with Jacob. This passage's explanation of Jacob's account suggests or solidifies one's teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ appearing in the form of an angel. Perhaps, this teaching is proven by the angel being referred to as God three times in these verses. In fact, Hosea 12:3 says "he struggled with God". Furthermore, Hosea 12:5 says "That is, the Lord God of hosts", which in this context further clarifies the angel is God.

Similarly, in a rather unique manner, the Angel of the Lord is actively involved in revealing to the prophet Zechariah the meaning of eight visions (Zech. 1:11-12; 1:13-14; 1:19; 2:3; 4:1; 4:4-5; 5:10; 6:4). Though the identity of the Angel of the Lord seems to be unclear at times, Zechariah 3:3-4 clearly identify the Angel of the Lord as the Lord who has the power to forgive sins. The text literally says "I have removed your iniquity";

thus, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Angel of the Lord, is involved in revealing the prophetic Word. Thirdly, the angels under the authority of the Angel of the Lord are depicted as fulfilling their duties as servants and messengers of God (Heb. 1:14).

Zechariah 1:10-11 describe the angels being sent out and returning with a report about the earth's condition. Finally, the Minor Prophets allude to the person, character and work of Satan, the fallen angel. In Zechariah 3:1-2, the accuser, Satan, stands on Joshua's right as he carries out his priestly duties, which Satan opposes Judah's deliverance.

Indubitably, crucial aspects of the nine basic Bible doctrines can be taught and preached from the Minor Prophets. As this section and the previous section of the paper illustrates all of these Bible doctrines directly or indirectly affect the faith and life of every believer.

## Chapter 6

### **An Approach to Planning and Preaching from the Minor Prophets**

Given all of the Scriptures are profitable for instruction in righteousness - how can pastors ensure the Minor Prophets are preached in proportion to preaching from the other books of the Bible? As this is a complex task and various opinions exist among evangelicals, it seems best to suggest a specific or definitive objective; thus, as it relates to this project, preaching expository messages through one of the books in the Minor Prophets over a five year period fulfills the premise of preaching proportionately from the Minor Prophets. In fact, one writer suggests "making it a goal to preach through one Old Testament book and one New Testament book each year."<sup>1</sup> Certainly, it is not realistic to suggest pastors must annually preach from the Minor Prophets, because as one attempts the planning process the variables are too extensive and fluid. For example, one's style of preaching suggests one pastor will preach through Habakkuk in 6 weeks, but it may take another pastor 12 weeks. Similarly, the number of times a pastor will preach throughout a given year is not the same, because many churches only have a Sunday morning service; in contrast, other churches will have services on Wednesday night and then twice on Sunday.

Furthermore, to ensure the Minor Prophets are preached regularly requires planning. In light of the focused objective and the desire to fulfill the Biblical mandate to preach the whole counsel of God, planning the five year preaching calendar will require much thought. Perhaps, one could establish a goal of preaching through one book from each of

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen N. Rummage, *Planning Your Preaching: A Step-by-Step Guide for Developing a One-Year Preaching Calendar* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2002), 84.

the types of books in the Bible; accordingly, one would preach through one book in the Pentateuch, Old Testament History, Old Testament Poetry, Major Prophets, Minor Prophets, Gospels, Pauline Epistles and the Pastoral Epistles. Acts and the book of Revelation are omitted, because that would suggest these books are to be preached every five years. At any rate, one is not restricted to preach only from the initial 8 or 9 books that meet the criteria. If time permits multiple books from the Minor Prophets may be preached. In addition, this is simply a guideline. One pastor's approach may be to identify the subjects to be discussed first and then afterwards determine which book of the Bible would best articulate the concerns. For instance, knowing and doing the will of God may result in an exposition of the book of Jonah.

Planning to preach from the Minor Prophets has to include ample preparation time. Considering the average pastor may be more familiar with the Greek language and New Testament history, it will require much more time initially and in some cases the week prior to actually preaching the message to prepare sermons from the Minor Prophets. In that regard, it seems best to suggest that one start studying the book approximately 3 to 4 months in advance. Each week 4 to 6 hours could be dedicated to this task. Doing so proves rather beneficial and sustains the efficacy of a relevant and biblical exposition. Issues surrounding the author, problematic text, the setting, purpose for writing and major themes within a specific book may be exhaustively studied. Similarly, the fruit of this toiling could result in thorough word studies, a better understanding of a specific doctrinal issue as well as a broader understanding of the cohesiveness and continuity of the Bible. This time can also be used for extensive reading, determining the most crucial sources and collecting illustrations that will best connect the congregant with the Biblical

text. Indeed, fragmented study and lack of preparation time will decrease the pastor's confidence and distort the clarity of the sermon.

Furthermore, if the proportion of sermons one preaches from the Minor Prophets will increase as well as the congregants' application of these books, pastors must be creative and innovative. Clarity, relevance and depth are intimately related to congregants' application of the biblical text. In other words, congregants must understand the biblical text well enough to grasp its meaning and be able to discern how their lives should be changed by what they are hearing. Given the lack of familiarity with the Minor Prophets, pastors may be able to overcome some of their concerns with a reasonable amount of innovation. In practical terms, Sunday school classes may be taught from a specific book of the Minor Prophets prior to one preaching from that same book; for example, a 12 week introduction to Amos over the summer would sufficiently prepare a congregation for an exposition of Amos in the fall. A weekly newsletter or an online tool could help expose congregants to books in the Minor Prophets. Fortunately, this exposure should not be boring, because the charts, maps, videos and audio sources available are innumerable. In fact, congregants can be given a dramatic reading of a book of the Bible, which can be used as one drives from one destination to another.

Most importantly, if the Minor Prophets are going to be preached more frequently pastors must intentionally determine to do it. Though not discounting the need for relevance or church growth principles, pastors must deem preaching the whole counsel of God more important than growing a large spiritually-anemic church. Similarly, expository preaching has to be embraced, especially if the Minor Prophets are to be grasped. Lastly, it is imperative that pastors not allow doctrinal issues, complexity of the



biblical text or any other issue to minimize their use of the Minor Prophets. In summary, pastors' approach to planning, innovation and ministry philosophies are essential in improving the regularity of one's preaching from the Minor Prophets.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion**

Provoking pastors to preach the Minor Prophets is the ultimate aim of this project. Though not exhaustive, this project evaluates and responds to many of the reasons why pastors do not preach from the Minor Prophets. In fact, this project effectively proves that the Biblical mandate to preach the whole counsel of God should compel pastors to proportionately preach from these important books. Concerns about pastors preferring to preach from the New Testament and the complexity of preaching the Minor Prophets seem to be minor when pastors are committed to biblical integrity and to pleasing God rather than man. Furthermore, four secondary concerns are addressed in this project: relevancy-oriented preaching, conversational style preaching, eschatological implications and the impact of postmodernism.

Accordingly, as these concerns are addressed it became apparent that they reflect preaching practices and ministry philosophies any pastor can effectively address. The resolution to these problems involves one deliberately deciding to fulfill the biblical mandate to preach the whole counsel of God. Regardless of what the average congregant may want to hear, pastors must resolve that postmodernist thinking, the audience's preference nor the latest church growth tactic should prohibit sound exposition from the Minor Prophets. Likewise, ease of preaching, complexity of understanding Old Testament prophetic books and lack of knowledge about eschatology are unacceptable reasons for not preaching the Minor Prophets. Certainly, in light of the tools and helps available today to assist pastors one cannot consider such appeals valid.

In a practical manner, what steps can pastors take to ensure they preach proportionately from the Minor Prophets? First, one's ministry philosophy has to be properly informed. Pleasing God must take priority over relevance and church growth principles. If emphasis is to be placed on preaching the Minor Prophets, embracing the biblical mandate to preach the whole counsel of God and sustaining biblical integrity are essential. In fact, if all of Scripture is profitable for God's use in maturing believers, the matter of relevance may be an application concern rather than a choice of text concern. Similarly, expository preaching rather than topical preaching may help one to appropriately prepare messages from the Minor Prophets.

Secondly, if the Minor Prophets are going to be preached in proportion to the other books of the Bible, one has to be intentional and determined in his planning. Planning a preaching calendar may imply one is taking the time to consider what God wants to convey to His people, while pondering one's own heart along with the needs of congregants. Further, intentionality affords one the time to consider what books of the Bible have been preached over the last five years and what books of the Bible may be preached over the next five years. Determination, a crucial attitude for achieving the biblical mandate of preaching the whole counsel of God, is vital if one will overcome the temptations to preach what one knows best, the easiest to grasp and what is most acceptable to congregants. Indeed, intentionality and determination in one's planning will ensure books of the Minor Prophets are preached.

Finally, one should remove every hurdle that will prohibit one's preaching and teaching from the Minor Prophets. If there are doctrinal concerns with preaching the prophetic texts, pastors must address these concerns directly. As these issues can be

rather complex, it seems best to recommend a careful and thorough study of the Bible. Similarly, if the concern is relevance, one should place ample emphasis on making appropriate applications to the biblical text as well as making congregants aware of the cohesiveness and the importance of preaching all the books of the Bible. Indeed, there will be problems; however, none are too big for the Spirit-filled pastor whose desire is to please God.

In light of improving upon this practical ministry concern, at least two considerations seem to develop. At the outset, effort could be given to developing an approach to ensure the historical and broader perspectives of the Minor Prophets are captured. Today pastors seem to be too focused on, "How does the text apply to the average congregant". In addition, the concern is what topics are the most interesting to the congregation. Such thoughts are reminiscent of, "What is in it for me?" Perhaps, a broader perspective of the Minor Prophets would best unfold God's purpose and plan for all of history rather than a preoccupation with personal problems. Secondly, a well-known conservative scholar should take up the mantle to ensure the Minor Prophets are preached more often. This writer can envision a book by the title *Preaching from the Minor Prophets* by Walter Kaiser. Given his numerous volumes on Old Testament theology, exegesis and preaching, he could effectively synthesize much of that work into a direct and exhaustive treatment of the Minor Prophets. Perhaps, an authoritative and prolific scholar could address the lack of preaching from the Minor Prophets and call pastors to action.

In short, this project exposes the evangelical community to the unprecedented dearth of preaching from the Minor Prophets, many of the concerns with preaching these books

and a sufficient response. In contrast to a lethargic and passive appeal, evangelicals who embrace this project's thesis should sense the urgency to conform. In fact, this project has renewed this writer's passion and desire to preach and teach the neglected Old Testament text, the Minor Prophets. Furthermore, this writer has been challenged to engage the culture, give more attention to relevance and never relent in regard to sound biblical exposition. May God help us not to neglect His Word and prolong the ever-increasing famine of sound biblical teaching (Amos 8:11). In conclusion, Steven Lawson with the support of many other evangelicals writes, "May preachers today expound the Book, the *whole* Book, and *nothing but* the Book - so help them God."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Steven J. Lawson, *Famine in the Land: A Passionate Call for Expository Preaching* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 17, 98-99.

## APPENDIX A

### LESSON 1 INTRODUCTION AN EXPOSITION OF AMOS



#### Lesson Notes

#### The Writer

Amos identified himself as the author (Amos 1:1). The name “Amos” was the Hebrew verb “amas”, which meant burden or **burden-bearer**; “amas” seemed to denote lifting or carrying a burden. Perhaps, the force of the message of Amos was heavy; Irving Jensen suggested the danger and poverty stricken life in Tekoa as well as Amos’ discipline and hardness prepared him to deliver God’s hard and severe message to Israel. Amos lived in Tekoa, 12 miles south of Jerusalem and 6 miles south of Bethlehem. Though nothing was recorded about Amos’ parents, he was not Isaiah’s father and the lack of an acknowledged family implied a common or poor family (Isaiah 1:1). Unlike most prophets, Amos clarified that he was not a prophet, a son of a prophet nor did he make his living as a prophet (Amos 7:14). Rather his occupations were “shepherd” and “a grower of sycamore figs” (Amos 1:1, 7:14). The Hebrew word for “shepherd” did not simply mean shepherd; instead Amos owned one or more herds of sheep (II Kings 3:4). Similarly, the Hebrew word for “grower” literally meant pincher; pinching was a process that pierced or scratched the fruit, which enabled it to ripen. Furthermore, the fig like fruit were not grown in Tekoa; the dry climate in Tekoa suggested the fruit were grown in a well watered plain (I Kings 10:27).

#### Date

The timing of the writing or at least of the date of God’s revelation to Amos was recorded in Amos 1:1. Amos marked the dating of his vision by identifying two Kings and a seemingly well-known earthquake. Though one cannot be certain about the date of the earthquake, it was significant enough that Amos felt the Hebrew people knew about it; also, it was referred to by the Prophet Zechariah, 200 years later, in a similar manner (Zechariah 14:5). In fact, some scholars cited archaeological evidence of an earthquake dating about 760 BC. Given this information and the dating of the Kings’ reign, as depicted below, it seemed plausible that Amos wrote this book between 790 and 755 BC.

# LESSON 1

## INTRODUCTION

### AN EXPOSITION OF AMOS



#### Lesson Notes

#### Timeline

Saul Reigned over the United Kingdom	1051-1011 BC
David Reigned over the United Kingdom	1011-971 BC
Solomon Reigned over the United Kingdom	971-931 BC
Divided Kingdom	931 BC
Jeroboam II Reigned over Israel	793-753 BC
Uzziah Reigned over Judah	790-739 BC
Amos Prophesied	790-755 BC
Birth of Christ	4 BC
Death, Burial & Resurrection of Christ	30 AD
Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple	70 AD

#### Recipients & Purpose

Despite the fact that many Gentile nations and Judah were mentioned, Amos wrote to Israel, the Northern Kingdom (I Kings 12:1-24, Amos 3:1; 5:1). Generally, Amos called the Northern Kingdom to repentance. Dr. Norman Geisler categorically described the purpose of the book; historically, it addressed Israel's need to repent; theologically, Israel's disregard for the Law; and Christologically, God's plan to restore the nation.

#### Key Concepts:

- injustice and oppression of the poor (2:6-7; 5:10-13; 6:12)
- improper response to prosperity (3:9-10, 15; 4:1; 8:5-6)
- complacency, idolatry and insincere worship (2:4-5; 4:4-5; 5:4-6; 5:21-23)

#### Setting:

Amos delivered a message of judgment in the midst of prosperous and peaceful times. Also, Israel and Judah both had strong militaries. King Uzziah's life, military success, construction and improvements of Judah's weaponry were recorded in II Chronicles 26. Three times he was spoken of in stalwart and influential terms, which his pride ruined (II Chronicles 26:5, 8, 15, 16-24). Perhaps, Jeroboam II increased or solidified the borders of Israel in the midst of weakened Syria, Assyria, Damascus and Egypt, which made it one of the largest influences in the Mediterranean.

# LESSON 1

## INTRODUCTION

### AN EXPOSITION OF AMOS



#### Lesson Notes

#### An Exposition of Amos 1:1-2

Up from the bleak hills of Tekoa came this  
 Shepherd turned prophet by the voice of God's roar;  
 Up from the life so familiar with terror.  
 So filled with oppression and so fraught with injustice.  
 Up from the southland came this prophet of old,  
 Sunbronzed and hardened, mature and emboldened.  
 Up came this prophet at the command of his God,  
 To rebuke and accuse, to attack and condemn.  
 Up came this prophet at the roar of the Lion,  
 A man under God for a world under sin!

In summary of Amos 1:1-2, Dr. Honeycutt suggests the poem above. Amos 1:1 in superscription form introduces Amos and the setting for understanding the book.

*Why did God choose to use Amos? Consider I Samuel 6:7*

Poetically, Amos 1:2 describes the force of the book. The message came from "Zion", Jerusalem, the temple or the place where God resides. The voice of God and the impact of His words are depicted as a roaring lion. Judgment is inevitable and God, as a lion does his prey, wants His message to be taken seriously. Further, this verse implies the land will experience a severe drought at the Words of the Lord (Deuteronomy 28:20-24; Jeremiah 25:30-33).

#### Digging Deeper:

What does the phrase "for three transgressions ... and for four" convey?

In your own words and after a careful study, describe the structure of Amos' message in Amos 1:3 - 2:16.

Reading through a book of the Bible in one setting has proven to be quite helpful with understanding it. Indeed, a greater appreciation and understanding of a book of the Bible is gained by reading the book a second time in another English translation. As you read the Book of Amos the second time, try to locate the verses Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. quotes in one of his Civil Rights messages. **Hint - injustice is a key concept in Dr. King's messages.**



## LESSON 2

### AN EXPOSITION OF AMOS



#### Lesson Notes

#### General Introduction to the Literary Structure Amos 1:1-2:16

God's indictment and announcement of judgment against the pagan nations and ultimately Judah and Israel are expressed in a lucid structure. Amos identifies the ultimate messenger, the nation, the sins against that nation, the punishment(s) and a reaffirmation of its ultimate messenger.

#### Consider the form of Amos 1:3-5:

**Ultimate Messenger** - "Thus says the Lord"

**Nation** - "for three transgressions of Damascus and for four"

**Sin(s)** - "threshed Gilead with implements of iron"

**Punishments** - burn the house of Hazael and the palaces (fortresses) of Ben-Hadad, break the gate bar at Damascus, cut off the King or inhabitants of Aven, remove the King in Beth Eden and Syrians exile to Kir

**Messenger Reaffirmed** - "Says the Lord"

#### An Exposition of the Literary Structure in Amos 1:3-2:16

Perhaps in prophetic style Amos ensures Israel that his messages are authoritative and from God. Though the force of the messages is evident in the phrase "the Lord roars from Zion", Amos opens and closes his messages with an indication of God's pointed involvement in pronouncing judgment upon the nations; thus, the judgments are preceded by the phrase "Thus says the Lord" and are followed by the phrase "Says the Lord". Similarly, personal pronouns all throughout the messages, which are spoken by God emphasize the force and authority of the messages.

The statement "for three transgressions of ... and for four" is an expression that may or may not correspond to the exact number of sins or the identified list of sins; thus, emphasizing a number of sins much greater than four. In this context, the severity of the sins Amos identifies as well as the unidentified list of numerous sins are stressed. In fact, Dr. Charles Feinberg suggests an "incalculable" number of sins, which renders the cup of "iniquity full" and worthy of the wrath of God.

# LESSON 2

## AN EXPOSITION OF AMOS

Beyond the severity of the sins Amos identifies, two other dynamics pertaining to the sins of the nations are worth noting. First, the sins of the nations are so severe that God is not willing to relent, turn back or revoke his punishment. Secondly, the word “transgressions” emphasizes these sins are **known rebellious acts**. Given this provocative declaration many have wondered if it is right for God to severely punish pagan nations for violating seemingly known covenant commandments. Though the Gentile nations are not God’s covenant people, they are still being held accountable to God for their actions. Particularly, God has made it clear that He will hold them accountable for how they treat Israel. In Isaiah 10:1-15 one can get a glimpse into how God uses a pagan nation, Assyria, to carry out judgment against Israel; however, in the midst of being used as God’s rod of correction Assyria sins. Judicially, Assyria and all the pagan nations are judged fairly. Furthermore, sin in a universal sense, regardless of whether it is committed by covenant people or pagans, will be accounted for by God. Though Jewish history and the sovereignty of God seems to imply the divine election and covenantal relationship of God with united Israel, creation, the fall of man, transference of the sin nature, the intrinsic moral conscience of man and the redemptive work of Christ advocate the universality of God’s authority, love, His laws and involvement (John 3:16, I Chronicles 29:11, Psalm 8:1, Psalm 19:1-4, Psalm 24:1-2, Psalm 33:6-8, Daniel 4:25, Romans 2:12-16).

*Make a list of the sins and rebellious acts that are destroying America. Consider what actions are necessary to call the nation to repentance.*

*Make a list of the sins and rebellious acts you have committed. Repent and ask God to forgive you!*

## An Exposition of Amos 1:3-5

### Gathering Info:

- Damascus was the capital of Syria
- Ben-Hadad II was the King of Syria (II Kings 8:9)
- Hazael, Ben-Hadad's successor, takes the throne by assassination (II Kings 8:15)
- Ben-Hadad III was Hazael's son (II Kings 13:3)



# LESSON 2

## AN EXPOSITION OF AMOS

The punishment God leverages against Damascus, Hazael and Ben-Hadad III, seems to only directly affect the descendants of Hazael and Ben-Hadad III. II Kings 16:9 records the ultimate fulfillment of God's judgment upon Damascus. Portions of God's judgment may have been fulfilled in the life of Ben-Hadad III, but the exact details pertaining to the battles he loses are not recorded (II Kings 13:24-25). Nevertheless, it is clear that God destroys the city with fire, burns the palaces or fortresses of Ben-Hadad, and destroys the defense or gate, for entering the city. Similarly, the King of Syria and the inhabitants of Damascus are killed or deported to Kir. The phrases "Valley of Aven" and "Beth Eden" refer to the "valley of sin" and the "garden of pleasure"; in literary terms, these phrases describe the illustrious and sinful city of Damascus.

## Digging Deeper:

Does Genesis 9:1-6 have anything to do with the universality of sin and God's accountability of sin?

In your own words and as you review this lesson, describe the structure of God's message to Gaza and Tyre (Amos 1:6-10).

In light of recent development, as it pertains to the ownership, control and use of the Gaza strip, find an article (newspaper, magazine or internet) to share with the class. If possible, evaluate the article in view of what the Bible teaches.



## Lesson Notes

[illegible]

# LESSON 3

## AN EXPOSITION OF AMOS

## An Exposition of Amos 1:6-8

### Literary Structure of Amos 1:6-8:

## Ultimate Messenger - “Thus says the Lord”

**Nation** - “for three transgressions of Gaza and for four”

**Sin(s)** - “deported an entire population to be held captive in Edom”

**Punishments** - burn Gaza's city wall, destroy Gaza's palaces (fortresses), destroy the inhabitants of Ashdod, cut off the King of Ashkelon, attack Ekron and the remnant of Philistines will die

## Messenger Reaffirmed - “Says the Lord”

God's message was to the nation of Philistia; however, only four of the five principal cities or cities possessing authoritative leaders were mentioned in these verses, Gaza, Ashkelon, Ekron and Ashdod (Joshua 13:3, I Samuel 6:16-17). Scholars argued that Gath, the fifth city, was quite insignificant by this time, because of King Hazael and King Uzziah's military campaigns (II Kings 12:17, II Chronicles 26:6, Amos 6:2). Though this suggestion was not definitive, Gath's association with the Philistines or its military strength was so insignificant it was not listed along with the others after this time (Zephaniah 2:4, Jeremiah 25:20).

Unfortunately, Amos 1:6-8 is hard to explicitly explain, because, in contrast to Amos 1:3-5, the verses substantiating the sins and punishments Amos pronounces are not recorded in Scripture. Nevertheless, it is implied that the Philistines sells “entire populations” of Israelites to Edom, who enslaves them. The phrase “to deliver them” in the NIV says “sold them”; the Hebrew word can convey to **turn over**; it has been used in the context of turning over a **fugitive**, a **runaway slave** or simply an enemy to judgment (Joshua 20:5, Deuteronomy 23:15, Deuteronomy 32:30). Given the numerous battles between the nations of Israel and Edom, it seems plausible that Edom wants to pay Israel back (Ezekiel 25:15-16). I Kings 11:14-16 records an instance of Israel severely tarnishing her relationship with Edom; in fact, all the males with the exception of those who escape are killed by Joab. Consequently, the actual sins of Philistia are cruelty, greed and participation in slave trade (Joel 3:1-5).



## Lesson Notes

[illegible]

# LESSON 3

## AN EXPOSITION OF AMOS

In light of the judgment Amos pronounced against the nation of Philistia, its fulfillment was not recorded in the Bible; however, Bible scholars found evidence in secular historical records, which declared Nebuchadnezzar conquered Gaza and Ashdod; Tiglath-Pileser III and Sennacherib, Assyrian Kings, conquered Ashkelon; and the surviving remnant of Philistines was annihilated during the Maccabean Period.

## An Exposition of Amos 1:9-10

### Literary Structure of Amos 1:9-10:

### Ultimate Messenger - “Thus says the Lord”

**Nation** - “for three transgressions of Tyre and for four”

**Sin(s)** - “deported an entire population to be held captive in Edom and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood”

**Punishments** - burn the wall of Tyre and destroy Tyre's palaces (fortresses)

### Messenger Reaffirmed - “Says the Lord”

Interestingly, God's message to Tyre, the principal Phoenician city, seemed to be similar if not a continuation of God's judgment upon Philistia. Strategically, Tyre was located about one half mile from the shore; it was a major seaport city, which much commerce and exportation took place. Amos pronounced God's judgment against the Phoenician's cruelty, greed and involvement in slave trade. Furthermore, Amos referred to a "covenant of brotherhood", which was not formal; however, it was a binding covenant. This informal relationship developed between King David and Hiram, the King of Tyre; it was sustained in the life of Solomon; and Hiram actually called Solomon his brother; specifically, 1 Kings 5:12 mentioned a treaty, but the details of the covenant were not recorded; consequently, this personal friendship and the lack of actual battles between the nations indicated a mutual love and respect of each other (1 Kings 5:1-12, 1 Kings 9:10-14). Amos declared Tyre broke the covenant and participated in trading and exporting her brother for money. In summary, God's judgment fell on Tyre and all who participated in trading and exporting Israelites (Joel 3:1-6, Isaiah 23, Ezekiel 26).



## Lesson Notes

This image shows a full page of blank graph paper. The background is white, and it is covered with a uniform grid of thin, light blue horizontal and vertical lines. The grid consists of small squares, typical of standard graph paper used for mathematics or engineering. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.



# LESSON 3

## AN EXPOSITION OF AMOS

*Given the lessons over the last couple of weeks, list the overarching themes discussed.*

*If the opportunity presents itself, would you out of greed mistreat your boss, coworkers, subordinates or friends? In addition, in the process of being nominated for a promotion, raise or higher position in the company, how would you respond? If necessary, would you lie or be deceitful about your past performance or that of others in the organization?*

*How involved do you believe God the Father is with selecting political leaders or permitting natural disasters?*



## Lesson Notes

[illegible]

## LESSON 4

### AN EXPOSITION OF AMOS



#### Lesson Notes

#### An Exposition of Amos 1:11-12

##### Literary Structure of Amos 1:11-12:

**Ultimate Messenger** - "Thus says the Lord"

**Nation** - "for three transgressions of Edom and for four"

**Sin(s)** - "pursued his brother (Jacob or united Israel) with the sword", showed no compassion and "perpetually" harbored anger towards him

**Punishments** - burn Teman and the palaces (fortresses) of Bozrah

##### Gathering Info:

- Edom was another name for the nation that consisted of the descendants of Esau (Genesis 36:1)
- During Rebekah's pregnancy, God told her Esau (Edom) shall serve Jacob (Genesis 25:23)
- Esau despised the birthright and Jacob and Rebekah cunningly took it from him, which conceived anger and bitterness among the brothers and ultimately their descendants (Genesis 25:29-34; Genesis 27, Genesis 32-33)
- Genesis 36 describes the genealogy and livelihood of Edom
- The King of Edom denied Moses' two requests to pass through their land (Numbers 20:14-21, Judges 11:17-18)
- David placed garrisons in Edom and made the Edomites his servants (I Chronicles 18:13)
- Many Kings of Judah experienced victory and upheaval in their desire to control Edom; King Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Jehoshaphat's son, and Ahaz were among those kings (II Chronicles 20:21-23, II Chronicles 21:8-10, II Chronicles 28:16-17).

Amos 1:11 records Edom's sin as a pursuit of his brother with the sword. Interestingly, in Genesis 27:40-41 Isaac prophetically blesses Esau and recounts much of Edom's history, which is in response to Esau's emotional plea for a blessing. At any rate, Isaac tells Esau he shall live by the sword, serve his brother and in distress he would put an end to his brother's domination. Surely, the relationship between Esau, the spiritually immature, and Jacob, the great deceiver, sets the scene for a lifetime of hatred and fighting.



# LESSON 4

## AN EXPOSITION OF AMOS

Perhaps, Jacob destroys any chance of the relationship being fully recovered by coldly discouraging the relationship and lying about intentions for not accompanying Esau or meeting him in Seir. In fact, Jacob cunningly avoids travelling with Esau after a very loving embrace and greeting (Genesis 33:4); Esau offers protection and help, but Jacob sends him away, deceives him in to thinking he would meet him in Seir and proceeds in the opposite direction (Genesis 33:12-17).

Though the Bible never again mentions interaction between Jacob and Esau, it clearly depicts much anger and fighting among their descendants. Amos clarifies Edom's sin as rebellious, which he describes as the sword being used against his brother. Deuteronomy 23:7 prohibits covenant people from attacking Edomites, because they are brothers. Logically, this law implies Edomites are not to attack Israelites. Edom's sin does not just reflect a lack of love for her brother, but it is expressed in bitter and unforgiving terms. The phrase "cast off all pity" is translated "stifled his compassion" in the NASB, which implies Edom does not show any compassion to his brothers. Similarly, Edom's anger is pointedly described. The word "tore" is the Hebrew word "taraph", which may be used literally or metaphorically of an animal tearing the carcass of another animal (Genesis 37:33). Lastly, Edom's anger is said to be perpetual and forever, which indicates an unrelenting desire to express anger and to continue fighting; the phrase "kept his wrath forever" is translated "maintained his fury forever" in the NASB; hence, Edom's anger seems to have lasted throughout its existence.



## Lesson Notes

[illegible]

# LESSON 4

## AN EXPOSITION OF AMOS



## Lesson Notes

Rocky Balboa, an American, after defeating Ivan Drago, a Russian, says, "If I can change. And you can change. Then everybody can change." The movie *Rocky IV* advocates the anger of two nations has been overcome or rendered questionable by two men beating each other senseless; hence, the audience's hatred of Rocky subsides as they face the unrelenting exertion in this seemingly pointless fight. Often in one's personal life and on a national level relationships are carried out in a similar manner. Anger and bitterness is harbored, because one party will not forgive the other.

Are you harboring anger or bitterness towards anyone?  
Do you perceive the US is harboring bitterness and  
anger towards a nation for the wrong reason?

The declaration of God's punishment against Edom seems brief; however, many of the other prophetic books identify God's punishment of Edom. Amos simply says the city of Teman will be set a fire, which will also burn the palaces or fortresses of Bozrah. This declaration really implies all of Edom's land will be burned; hence, Teman in the south and Bozrah in the north entail the entirety of the land. Furthermore, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Obadiah and Malachi all pronounce judgment against Edom; they describe God's displeasure and actions He takes against them for Edom's treatment of Israel (Isaiah 63:1-7, Jeremiah 49:7-22, Ezekiel 25:12-14, Joel 3:19, Obadiah 1:10-14, Malachi 1:4).

## Digging Deeper:

## What does the Bible say about bitterness and anger?

How long should one harbor bitterness or the desire to seek revenge upon his brother?

Though God divinely unfolds history, what should be a nation's perspective on attacking another nation?

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## LESSON 5

### AN EXPOSITION OF AMOS



#### Lesson Notes

#### **An Exposition of Amos 1:13-15**

##### **Literary Structure of Amos 1:13-15:**

**Ultimate Messenger** - "Thus says the Lord"

**Nation** - "for three transgressions of the people of Ammon and for four"

**Sin(s)** - "ripped open the women with child in Gilead"

**Punishments** - burn the wall of Rabbah and its palaces (fortresses); the king and princes will be held captive

**Messenger Reaffirmed** - "Says the Lord"

##### **Gathering Info:**

- The nation of Ammon was conceived through an incestuous relationship; Lot's youngest daughter had a son, Ben-Ammi, whose descendants were the Ammonites (Genesis 19:30-38).
- God instructed the children of Israel not to come near or try to run the Ammonites from their land, because He had given it to them; they were descendants of Lot. (Deuteronomy 2:19).
- Ammonites were excluded from Israel's assembly and participation in worship for 10 generations, because they did not greet Israel in a friendly manner after she was delivered from Egypt; likewise, God held them accountable for assisting Moab to hire Balaam; he was hired as a diviner to curse Israel (Deuteronomy 23:3-5, Nehemiah 3:2).

The Ammonites were godless and cruel people. They worshipped the idol Molech (Milcom), the fire-god (I Kings 11:5-7). Associated with Molech worship was the heathen practice of human sacrifices upon an altar, preferably young children (Leviticus 18:21, 20:2-5, II Kings 23:10, Ezekiel 23:37). The cruel act committed by the Ammonites was not specifically recorded in Scripture; however, it seemed like it was a common practice among invaders, who when confronted with pregnant women ripped open their stomachs and destroyed their children (II Kings 8:12, II Kings 15:16). Despite the fact that the destruction of the pregnant women and their children were not mentioned and the Ammonites ultimately lost the war, the context of I Samuel 11:1-11 appeared to be a possible and appropriate setting.

# LESSON 5

## AN EXPOSITION OF AMOS

Equally Judges 11 provided a context for the cruel acts of the Ammonites toward pregnant women.

Though this sin was reprehensible, the Ammonite's reason for doing it was just as heinous. They were doing it to enlarge their border. An enlarged border was not sinful, but desiring it apart from the will of God was sinful (Deuteronomy 19:8, 1 Chronicles 4:10, Zephaniah 2:8-11). Furthermore, the Ammonites were inhumane and did whatever they deemed necessary. Strategically, fewer births meant less military power and resistance to a nation's authority in the future (Exodus 1:8-22). The Ammonites' insatiable desire for power and greed were the underlying sins Amos identified.

The declaration of God's punishment against Ammon is graphic. At the outset God says the wall of Rabbah, the capital city of Ammon, will be set on fire along with its palaces or fortresses. The wall around the city serves as a defense against outsiders; however, God says He is going to destroy it. The NASB says "war cries" and the perception of a "storm" will be evident. The storm is used figuratively to refer to the force of the Army that will destroy Ammon. The war cry is possibly a way of identifying an imminent attack (Numbers 10:9, Jeremiah 49:2-3, Ezekiel 25:1-7). Ultimately, the King and his princes will be taken captive.

Do you perceive greed to be a major issue in American culture? Are you aware of any immoral or cruel act(s) that occurred as a result of greed or desire for power? Do you personally have a problem with greed or 'thirst for power'?

Consider Psalm 10:3, Mark 7:21-22, I Timothy 6:17, Hebrews 13:5

How involved should the people of God be with worshipping idols? Was it okay for Solomon, the King of Judah, to marry the daughter of a foreigner and later erect an altar to her God? Consider I Kings 11:1-7, II Kings 23:12-14 and II Chronicles 12:13.

Does Jews intermarrying with foreigners correlate with any New Testament principle?



## Lesson Notes

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# LESSON 5

## AN EXPOSITION OF AMOS

## Digging Deeper:

How would you explain and reconcile the meaning of the words “king” in Amos 1:15 and “Milcom” in Jeremiah 49:3? Both passages imply the king or the god Milcom “shall go into captivity with his priests and his princes”. The Biblical texts actually consist of two different Hebrew words; the Hebrew word “melek” is translated king; and the Hebrew word “malcam” is translated “Milcom” or “Molech”.

Are there any notable associations or relationships between Moab, Ammon and Edom? Consider the following passages: Genesis 19:30-38, Deuteronomy 2:1-8, 2:16-19, I Kings 11:1-8, Ezekiel 25:1-14.



## Lesson Notes

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## Appendix B

Title: **The City Beyond Discipline - Is Not Beyond God's Judgment**

Focal Passage: **Zephaniah 3:1-7**

### Sermon Outline:

I. A Panoramic View of the prophecy of Zephaniah (**II Kings 21-22**).

II. Pronouncement of charges against the city and its leaders (**Zephaniah 3:1-4**).

- A. The leaders are generally described
- B. Collectively, as a city, the attitudes and actions of the leaders are described
- C. Distinctively, the attitudes and actions of the civil and religious leaders are described

III. Though the Lord is righteous, just and trustworthy as it relates to sin, the city leaders show no shame nor any sign of repentance (**Zephaniah 3:5-7**).

- A. In the presence of the Lord and amid His divine judgment of sin its business as usual
- B. Surely after observing God's judgment of sin in the nations, the city would repent; however, they were eager to commit corruption

### Opening Illustration:

Civil and religious scandals and corruption are so common in America that instead of embracing the need for repentance and reform, these situations have become a great source of entertainment. Simply mentioning a name, circumstance or both would quickly lead to much exchange of information, but very little remorse or righteous indignation. In this pluralistic, callous and lackluster culture, no one seems to be interested or concerned about God's perspective on these matters. Yet, the words "investment scandal", "gambling in Atlantic City or New Orleans", "congressional ethics committee", "pay-to-play", "presidential candidate illicit sexual affair", "gay clergy", "Proposition 8" or "televangelists congressional inquiries" are indications of civil and religious corruption rampant throughout most major cities in the US.

Interestingly, I have helped at least one woman battle the credit card companies.

Afterwards, I asked myself how could a woman with a fixed income of less than \$1000.00 per month be allowed to accumulate over \$30,000.00 worth of credit card debt? Certainly, she is responsible for her actions; however, the greedy banker who practiced immoral banking principles is guilty. The greedy governor of Delaware who encouraged the credit card companies to come there and practice immoral banking principles is responsible. And the federal government, who allowed Delaware and other states to authorize banks to offer people credit card debt they could never afford, should be held accountable. And to make matters worse, the interest rates on those cards were also immoral. Perhaps, given such corruption, it is clear that the cities in the US are in dire need of a revival. Unfortunately, many civil and political leaders, as in Zephaniah's day, are ignoring the presence of God and His guidelines stipulating how civil and religious leaders ought to treat every citizen. At any rate, consider with me the subject, **"The City Beyond Discipline - Is Not Beyond God's Judgment"**.

### A Panoramic View:

To understand this passage we must keep in mind the historical setting surrounding this prophecy. Zephaniah was a prophet to Israel during the reign of King Josiah. In II Kings chapters 21 and 22, the two kings of Judah prior to the reign of Josiah and the prophetic ministry of Zephaniah are described. These two kings were King Manasseh and his son Amon. Manasseh reigned 55 years and His son reigned 2 years. The Bible teaches that King Manasseh was so evil that God distinctively determined to make the city desolate and place the inhabitants in bondage to their enemies.

**Explicitly it states in II Kings 21:10-15:** "And the LORD spoke by His servants the prophets, saying, "Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations (he has acted more wickedly than all the Amorites who *were* before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols), "therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Behold, *I* am bringing *such* calamity upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle. 'And I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab; I will wipe Jerusalem as *one* wipes a dish, wiping *it* and turning *it* upside down. 'So I will forsake the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become victims of plunder to all their enemies, 'because they have done evil in My sight, and have provoked Me to anger since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day.'"

Furthermore, the Bible teaches that he led the people to worship Baal and Asherah; he defiled the temple and had the priest worshipping Baal (II Kings 21:1-3). He built idols in the temple (II Kings 21:4-5). He led the people in sacrificing their own children as burnt offerings to the heathen Gods; and he practiced witchcraft (II Kings 21:6). He even killed large numbers of innocent people (II Kings 21:16).

Upon King Manasseh's death, his son Amon reigned for two years. Amon perpetuated his father's evil practices. Fortunately, his aide plotted against him and killed him. Afterwards, Amon's son, Josiah, became King. Unlike his father and grandfather, King Josiah was a righteous king. So righteous that he caused a revival to take place in the land. And because of his righteousness, God specifically postponed His judgment of Judah until after the death of King Josiah.

**Consider what it says in II Kings 22:19-20:** "because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard *you* ," says the LORD. "Surely, therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place.'"

Given the evil acts of King Manasseh, God sent the prophet Zephaniah to remind Judah and the city of Jerusalem about the imminent judgment.

At this point in our understanding of the passage, there are a number of things we need to keep in mind:

- The indictments in this passage referred specifically to the sins of the people of Judah, who lived during the time of King Josiah and the prophet Zephaniah.
- Indeed, many of the practices alluded to in the indictments have been perpetuated throughout Israel's history to the present time. And until Israel repents these practices will continue to be a part of Israel's history.
- This passage is directly associated with the rest of the verses in chapter 3, which anticipates a worldwide judgment, the day of the Lord, and the repentance and restoration of the nation of Israel. In other words, sometime in the future all of the earth and its inhabitants are going to experience catastrophic and dreadful pain as the wrath of God is poured out. And in the midst of the judgment of God, the blood of the Israelites will be avenged; the Israelites will repent as a nation; and God will restore the nation of Israel.

Given this understanding, our goal is to use the time remaining to understand Judah's attitude towards God and sin during the time of the prophet Zephaniah. Similarly, we want to draw from Zephaniah 3 applicable and relevant applications.



### Point 1: Pronouncement of charges against the city and its leaders (Zephaniah 3:1-4).

**Proposition / Background:** *Like Judah, America is indifferent to the discipline of God.*

Maybe God's description of the condition of the city of Judah and its leader will help us to grasp the fact that we are indifferent to the discipline of God:

- Judah's inhabitants were considered **oppressors, polluted** (involved in profane worship) and **rebellious** (Zeph. 3:1).
- Judah's attitude reflected an incessant disobedient, rebellious and insensitive relationship with God. Zephaniah 3:2 teaches that Judah was not willing to obey the voice of God nor heed **His correction or discipline**. Furthermore, she lacked a **trusting** and **intimate relationship** with God. Perhaps, any parent who has raised or observed someone raising a rebellious teenager knows that Judah is heading for trouble.
- Who led Judah to become this way? **The civil and religious leaders!** Interestingly, Zephaniah uniquely described Judah's leaders:
  - Judah's princes were described as roaring lions, which in a negative sense implied strong, heady and prideful civil leaders. Perhaps, men who would literally destroy another out of **greed and desire for power**.
  - Judah's judges were described as wolves, meaning deceptive, greedy ("evening wolves") and heartless.
  - Judah's spiritual leaders were the prophets and priests, who were insolent, treacherous, disobedient and greedy. The priests offered blemished and defiled sacrifices upon the altar. Dr. John Hannah in the Bible Knowledge commentary, which I often reference, wrote the prophets were "**arrogant religionists**" concerned only about their "**bulging purses**". Dr. Walter Kaiser, described these spiritual leaders as those who pleased man rather than God. He further stated and I quote, "**like many contemporary pastors**, Judah's priest did "violence to the law" by replacing God's Holy Word with their own ideas, adapting the words of Scripture so as to fit the popular eddies and moods of the day!"

**Illustration / Application:** Surely, politicians, lawyers, judges and pastors today are just as greedy, ruthless and insensitive to God as Judah's were during the time of Zephaniah the prophet. Nevertheless, consider for a moment, - "How many ways have the cities in America rejected and failed to obey clear teachings in the Scripture?" Isn't it true that the rich are oppressing the poor? Is it really a socialistic government that we are arguing against when we pass immoral and unethical bills? Whether one is a democrat or republican, bills that favor lining the pockets of politicians and the rich at the expense of the best possible healthcare for all, hard earned retirement accounts and an unprecedented list of moral values (abortions, gay rights, same-sex marriage), signify and are symptomatic of a nation in need of God. Though it's rarely discussed many local pastors are invited to county and city meetings to decide whether gambling should be allowed in the city. Some politician will get up and talk about the financial benefits. The city's police chief may or may not warn the mayor of the impending crime. Now - what do you think pastors ought to say? I know what I would say. First, I am depending upon God and not the state of Louisiana or any state and gambling profits to educate my children. Similarly, the need for additional police officers

and gambling addiction treatment centers can be prevented by not installing the slot machines. I do not want my daughter or your daughter to become a prostitute to support her gambling addiction. And enough lives have already been destroyed by our immoral funding of the state government. Like Judah, we can trust our own intelligence, our own military power and crooked politicians as well as crooked Christian leaders instead of God and His Word. By doing so, I promise you, we will live in fear. No nation or city can be at rest without honoring, embracing and obeying the sovereign One.

**Point 2: Though the Lord is righteous, just and trustworthy as it relates to sin, the city leaders show no shame nor any sign of repentance (Zephaniah 3:5-7).**

Is it possible that God is not concerned about with how we live our lives? Is it possible that cities and nations are beyond God's ability to do something about the conditions within the nations? No, that is not the case!! As suggested in Zephaniah 3:5-7, the city of Judah and certainly every city in the world are confronted with the presence and the character of God. In other words, God is well aware of what is going on in the world. And because He is righteous and just, it is impossible for Him not to judge the cities of the world. Judah being God's chosen people should have known this; however, in her rebellious and sinful state she showed no shame.

**Proposition / Background:** *Nations and cities ought to be governed by what we know about God.*

**Zephaniah identifies three characteristics about God, which Judah should have considered:**

- The initial part of Zephaniah 3:5 says, "The Lord is **righteous** in her midst, He will do **no unrighteousness**." Judah should have known that God is righteous. It is impossible for Him to do anything wrong or that does not character.
- The latter part of Zephaniah 3:5 says, "Every morning He brings His **justice** to light." This statement implies that God is just. Furthermore, it reminds Judah that "every morning" or in a true sense at all times God is just.
- Zephaniah also says, "He never fails", which implies the character of God is **constant**. He never changes and it is impossible for Him to act in a manner that is not consistent with his character.

God purposefully revealed His character to Judah and conveyed it in these terms through the prophet Zephaniah, because He wanted Judah to know He was ever present to meet her needs. No - it was not through His lack of judgment or love for Judah that she lived and felt this way about God. Yet, it's clear to me that Judah's civil and religious leaders should have tended to their affairs with a clear understanding of the character of God. What do we know about God? More importantly, are we governing our affairs in accordance with our knowledge of Him?

**Proposition / Background:** *Nations and cities ought to learn by observing God.*

**Illustration / Application:** Many quotes have been made about the past and repeating past mistakes. Mark Twain once said, "The past may not repeat itself, but it sure does rhyme". Robert Penn Warrens says, "The past is always a rebuke to the present." Perhaps, the quote that is most applicable to this text is made by George Santayana; he writes, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

In some ways God the Father was trying to get Judah to acknowledge how He disciplined the nations. Zephaniah 3:6 graphically demonstrated God's judgment of the nations for their sins. Apparently, through God's judgment upon the nations Judah should have learned that God must judge sin.

### Closing Thought:

As I meditated on this passage I was reminded of Jesus as He entered the city of Jerusalem. Luke 19:41-44 states:

Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things *that make* for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. "For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, "and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

Then I was led in my study to the words in Jeremiah 13 and Romans 9. In light of Judah's disobedience, Jeremiah says:

But if you will not hear it, My soul will weep in secret for *your* pride; My eyes will weep bitterly And run down with tears, Because the LORD'S flock has been taken captive (Jer. 13:17).

In Romans 9:2, Paul made the following words as he thought about the heritage and failure of Israel to repent and embrace Christ; Paul says, "I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart."

Judah the city and Israel the nation lived in rebellion for thousands of years. And though they were being disciplined by God and warned by the prophets, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostles they are still living in rebellion. As we just studied, Jeremiah, Jesus and the Apostle Paul were deeply moved by their rebellious and prideful actions. It's not a godless prayer breakfast in Washington D.C. that we need. America is not in need of an insincere "National Day of Prayer". No - in Old Testament language, America needs to come to God wearing sack cloths with shaven heads. Inwardly, the President, all political leaders and god-fearing clergy should come before God with a contrite and broken spirit. Do you think we are we beyond God's Discipline? I think not! And, if we do not heed the warnings implied in Scripture we along with Judah are subject to God's judgment.

## Appendix C

Title: **Defiled or Pure, Let's Talk to God About Our Worship**

Focal Passage: **Malachi 1:6-12**

### Sermon Outline:

- I. Pure or Defiled Worship involves a relationship with God (**Malachi 1:6**).
  - A. Does your worship honor or dishonor God the Father
  - B. Does your worship reverence or show contempt towards God, the Master
  
- II. Pure or Defiled Worship reflects your attitude towards God and His name (**Malachi 7-9**).
  - A. **Rebelliously** - You ask, "**In what way have we despised your name?**"
  - B. God the Father Responds:
    - 1. You offer defiled (blind, lame and sick) food on the altar
    - 2. He illustrates: Why treat God worse than you would a government official
  
- III. Defiled Worship will not be accepted by God (**Malachi 1:10-12**).
  - A. Rather than conducting defiled worship, the Priests should be respectable enough to close the doors
  - B. Useless (in vain) and empty worship is unacceptable
  - C. Though the Jews despise worship of God, the Gentiles will honor His name and offer a pure sacrifice

### Opening Illustration:

In a conversation with God about your worship of Him - what would He say to you? And how would you respond? If He charged you with not being prepared for worship, what would you say? If He reminded you that you disregarded him all week long and that you are not ready to worship Him, what would you say? If He brought to your attention the relationship problems you have with your husband, wife, children, parent, brother or sister, what would you say? If He whispered in your ear, "I know about your secret sin", what would you say? If He suggested your heart is not right to participate in communion, what would you say?

As a child growing up I learned very early on that my mother was not going to tolerate backtalk, disrespect, facial expressions or anything of the sorts. I learned that my mother demanded respect and a positive attitude and there was a right and a wrong way to do anything. Back then dishwashers were not heard of; however, my two sisters, my brother and I had to wash dishes before bed. We each washed dishes a certain night during the week. And the dishes had to be clean. If they were not clean my mother would simply say wash them all over again. During that time many of the plastic cups and bowls we used were hard to clean. Grease was hard to get off the plastic dishes. Nevertheless, if my mother found one dish with grease on it, all of them had to be washed again. And I promise you, she did not tolerate any discussion about whether the dishes were clean, how hard it was to get the job done or how tired one may be. Instead, she demanded a positive and I will do better this time attitude.

In some ways the priests seem to have forgotten their home training. They knew how they were to reverence and worship God, but out of rebellion they were disobedient and had the wrong attitude. Their attitude is reflected in God's discussion with them about their worship

of Him. Therefore, I want to speak to you from the subject, "**Defiled or Pure, Let's talk to God about our worship.**"

**Point 1: Pure or Defiled Worship involves a relationship with God (Malachi 1:6).**

**Proposition / Background:** *Father and Son and Master and Servant relationships imply God the Father loves His children, but He expects them to obey Him.*

Every relationship requires one to recognize his or her role in that relationship. In Malachi 1:6 God accuses the priest of failing to honor Him as their Father and reverencing Him as their Master. Certainly, the problem was severe, because as mentioned in Malachi 1:1-5 they accused God of failing to show love to them. God had to prove to them how He constantly loved them unconditionally, sovereignly and despite their rebellious attitudes and sinful actions. How sad - the whole nation and its spiritual leaders no longer honored and revered God.

**Illustration / Application:** Given that God the Father cannot sin, what would cause pastors throughout the country to sense God's love is failing or He is no longer worthy of honor and respect. Many on September 11, 2001 looked to the church for an answer. Many thought, well Christians, - where is God the Father? Why did He allow this country to be attacked? Oddly, many pastors were afraid to say - He's right where He has always been. He does not change. He is love. His love never fails. Yet, He's sovereign and just. His judgment and equity is not subject to man's finite rationale. And - could it be that as a nation God is punishing us, warning us or trying to get our attention. If God is our Father and Master, do we honor and reverence Him? As a nation, are we obeying Him.

Suppose you were talking to God and you agreed with Him on the basis of John 3:16 and John 1:12 that He loves you and He is your Father. And as the discussion develops, He accuses you of not honoring and reverencing Him. **How would you respond?** Would you demand proof? Get angry! Or rebelliously refuse to accept what He says. Hopefully, you would acknowledge that He is right, confess, repent and ask Him to forgive you. Well, we know that is not what the priest in Malachi's day did. In Malachi 1:6 the Bible says in a conversational manner they asked God, "In what way have we despised Your name?" They were so insensitive to God. They had allowed themselves to draw so far away from Him they needed proof, evidence or something tangible to clarify the problems in their hearts. Certainly, pastors, church leaders and even just the Sunday morning Christian should be very careful not to allow themselves to drift away from God. Paul's admonition to Timothy is clear and given the very important nature of Pastor's work and the evangelistic work of every believer, we - "must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ;" and we must fight for our spiritual lives by not being entangled in the evil, ungodly and worldly things; knowing our objective in life "is to please Him" who called us into the ministry (2 Tim. 2:3-4). Unfortunately, the words of Richard Baxter, who lived in the 17th Century, are quite relevant to our day; he writes, "The great and lamentable sin of ministers of the gospel is that they are not fully devoted to God. They do not give themselves wholly to the blessed work they have undertaken."

**Point 2: Pure or Defiled Worship reflects your attitude towards God and His name (Malachi 1:7-9)**

**Proposition / Background:** *This sacred group of spiritual leaders, priests, should not have been involved in Impure Worship.*

**Certainly not the priest .... Why? Because:**

- **Any Levite could not become a priest; if a Levite had any physical defect, he was disqualified to serve as a priest (Lev. 21:17-23).** **Leviticus 21:21-22** say, "No man of the descendants of Aaron the priest, who has a defect, shall come near to offer the offerings made by fire to the LORD. He has a defect; he shall not come near to offer the bread of his God. He may eat the bread of his God, *both* the most holy and the holy; only he shall not go near the veil or approach the altar, because **he has a defect, lest he profane My sanctuaries**; for I the LORD sanctify them."
- **The priest had to live a holy and consecrated life,** (Lev. 21:1-15). In Leviticus 21:1-15 the Bible teaches that the priest were to be holy. And to commit certain acts would defile them and make them unfit to serve as priest. Specifically, verses 2-4 teach they could not attend a funeral or get near a dead body except in the case of a very near relative; verses 5-6 admonishes them about how to maintain their beard and the hair on their head; in verses 7-9 God instructs Moses to let the priests know they could not marry a harlot, a divorced woman or a woman who had previously had sexual intercourse; and to stress the importance of these guidelines God restates them to Moses. In the midst of this discussion, Leviticus 21:8 is worth reading; it says, "Therefore you shall consecrate him, for he offers the bread of your God. He shall be holy to you, for I the LORD, who sanctify you, *am* holy."
- **Illustration / Application:** Perhaps, many preachers today could use a strong dose of this passage. Do you think it would be okay, if I were to preach on Sunday morning and Wednesday night, but throughout the week disregard the things of God? In most evangelical circles, we say that every believer is a priest; however, we create one standard for the preacher and another standard for the Christian. Yes, I agree James warns that not many should desire to become teachers, because of a stiffer judgment. But what about the words in I Peter 1:15, which says, "**be ye Holy for I am Holy.**" Surely, this verse is calling all of us to live a life of holiness.
- **The priests were to teach the people** (Lev. 10:10-11). Though pastors today are not required to offer sacrifices on the altar, we are certainly required to teach the Word of God. Perhaps, the teaching involved a person's lifestyle and the ability to discern between good and evil (Mal. 3:18); definitely, it involved knowing the difference between a worthy and an unworthy sacrifice (Deut. 24:8). At any rate, Malachi 2:7-8 emphasized that these priests who offered impure sacrifices were also guilty of failing to teach the Law; it says, "For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, And *people* should seek the law from his mouth; For he is the messenger

of the LORD of hosts. No doubt many today, who make little of the sacredness of worshipping God, are equally guilty of not preaching sound biblical messages.

**Proposition / Background:** *God is well aware of how the Priests offer **Impure (defiled) Sacrifices**.*

**They Asked:** How have we despised your name?

**God Responds:** You offer defiled (blind, lame and sick) food on the altar

**God Illustrates:** By doing this - Are you treating **Me** worse than you would a government official

A. In Malachi 1:7 the word “despised” in the NKJV has been translated “contempt” in the NIV. “Contempt” in our English vernacular may mean to display an **attitude of utter disgust or hatred**. Furthermore, in the OT the word “despised” has been used in many contexts to refer to the act of rejecting or ignoring something or someone. For example, Proverbs 15:20 and 15:32 convey the idea of one rejecting or displaying the wrong attitude towards discipline and sound instructions. Perhaps, we can conclude that the Israelites and the priests were displaying a similar attitude. Malachi 1:12 further discusses their attitude towards the sacrificial system that God had established; it says, “But **you profane it**, In that you say, ‘The table of the LORD is defiled; And **its fruit, its food, is contemptible**.”

*. . . . What did they do? . . . . They offered defiled food on the altar.*

B. Let's consider what it means to offer “**defiled food**” upon the altar of God. The word “food” in 1:7 seems to be best translated “bread” as in the KJV. Though the Hebrew word has been translated “meat” in some places, it can mean “food” in a general sense; or it is translated “bread”, which may support the idea of the priests accusing God of being hungry or wanting bread from their table. Psalm 50:5-14 best illustrate this distorted and evil view of the sacrificial system; after elaborating upon the act of offering a sacrifice, verse 12 says, “If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world *is* Mine, and all its fullness.” Consequently, such an evil practice is a human expression for worshipping pagan idols; God's purpose is imbedded in offering a pure sacrifice as a necessary payment to atone for sins.

Lastly, the phrase “defiled food” or “bread” is important, because the offering should have represented **vigorous effort** on the part of the people to produce the grain (Lev. 2:1-3, 2:11-14). Perhaps, many had begun purchasing animals to offer as a sacrifice. Surely, those who had to come from great distances did not want to bring along what was required by the law. Deuteronomy 15:19 seems to imply that the people were to set apart from that which they had labored for with their own hands; it states, “All the firstborn males that come **from your herd** and **your flock** you shall sanctify to the LORD your God; you shall do no work with the firstborn of **your herd**, nor shear the firstborn of **your flock**.” Similarly, II Samuel 24:24 conveys the necessity for one not to offer something to God that did not cost them anything. Consider what it says, “Then the king said to Araunah, “No, but I will surely buy *it* from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that



**which costs me nothing."** So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver."

They offered blind, lame and sick offerings upon the altar. Yet, the law specifically forbade them from doing this (Deut. 15:21; Lev. 1:3).

**Illustration / Application:** As a believer, what is your attitude towards worship? Is your worship of God worthy of Him? Many years ago, I carelessly left my lawnmower outside. I failed to cover it from the elements. When it came time to cut the grass it would not start. In brief, I did everything I could to start it, but it would not start. Finally, I realized the gas tank was half filled with water and half filled with gas. I did the best I could to drain it, but it took months to get that mower functioning at peak performance. Many Christians and perhaps many pastors are like that old lawnmower; they are half filled with gas and half filled with water. So long as they disregard and half-heartedly serve God, they will just sputter and live a cumbersome and spiritually declining life.

**Proposition / Background:** *God should be worshipped, honored and revered.*

Should pastors or Christians be concerned about honoring or reverencing man more than God? In Malachi 1:8 God propositioned the priests to clarify whether it is rational for them to respect their finite governor more than Him. In fact, their Governor would not tolerate their behavior; so, why should they expect God to tolerate their disrespectful attitudes and actions. This illustration suggests several factors that we should consider:

a. **The priests seem to fear their governor more than God.** In fact, Proverbs 20:2 illustrates how stupid a man would be **not to fear the King**. Similarly, Prov. 29:25 teaches that it is beneficial for the believer to **fear God rather than man**; it says, "The fear of man brings a snare, But whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe." Perhaps, the message for you and I is that we need to evaluate how much we fear God. How often do we consciously sin? And when we do, we know beforehand what we were doing was against the Word of God.

b. Also this illustration suggests that some seem to think that **the judgment of God has either been postponed or negated beyond its impact upon them**. Leviticus 10:1-3 describe a time in the life of the priests that God immediately judged two of them for profaning the sacrifice. Similarly, Romans 6:1-2 describe the attitude of many believers today towards sin. Surely, if most of us took the time to consider our worship of God, our reverence of His name, the quality of our worship, our devotion to Him and our intensity for expressing our love for Him, we would fall on our faces in repentance.

### Point 3: Defiled Worship will not be accepted by God (Malachi 1:8-10).

**Proposition / Background:** *God deemed defiled worship, evil, useless and unacceptable.*

The heinous sins of the priests were described as being **evil**, **useless** and **unacceptable**:

- Malachi 1:8 teaches that it **was evil for the priest to offer to God, the blind, lame and sick**. The word “evil” is the Hebrew word, which conveys the act of carrying out evil. As a pastor, I would not feel too comfortable knowing that as I carried out my duties, I was committing evil acts. Deuteronomy 15:19-21 explain that the law required every sacrifice to be without any blemish (Lev. 22:19-25).
- Malachi 1:7 implied that the priests considered the table of the Lord contemptible. In Malachi 1:9-10 God implied **it was useless to offer sacrifices**, if the sacrifices were defiled. Furthermore, God said in Malachi 1:10, "Who *is there* even among you who would shut the doors, So that you would not kindle fire *on* My altar in vain?" In other words, someone should have had enough respect for God to stop offering useless sacrifices upon the altar by locking the doors of the temple.
- Unfortunately, whether they shut the doors or not, God deemed their **worship unacceptable**. The latter part of verse 10 says, "I have no pleasure in you," Says the LORD of hosts, "Nor will I accept an offering from your hands."

### Closing Illustration:

Dr. J. Vernon McGhee went to visit a man in the hospital. After arriving in the man's room, Dr. McGhee said the man asked him to put an extra blanket on the bed. As the discussion developed, the man proceeded to complain about how cold the hospital kept the rooms. Not long thereafter, on his way home, Dr. McGhee said he couldn't believe the man was complaining about the room being cold, because he was burning up. Certainly, every church has its share of people who are cold spiritually, people who are not truly worshipping God. Their weekly activities, character and zeal for God are a direct indication of how much they love and want to honor God. They tithe and sit on the pew, but they are not concerned about lost people and their giving does not reflect much of a sacrifice. And if you get to know them very well you know they are indifferent to spiritual things. I know we are not required to offer sacrifices. But let me ask you, **if you were talking to God about your worship of Him, would He say your worship is unacceptable.**

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Senior Pastor: February 2008 - present, Berean Baptist Church  
Charlottesville, Virginia

**PROFESSIONAL**

United States Army, 1987 - 2007 (retired)

Adjunct Professor: January 2008 - present, The Baptist College of Florida  
Graceville, Florida