

Reading the Book of the Twelve Prophets

Reading Hosea

The Big Picture

- 1–3 Hosea's marriage
 - 1 Narrative: Hosea's marriage
 - 2 Poetry: Yahweh and Israel's marriage
 - 3 Narrative: Hosea's marriage
- 4–14 Poems about Israel's infidelity, Yahweh's justice and mercy, and future hope
- 14:9 Prophetic concluding note

Historical Context:

Hosea lived during the mid-700's BC: this was a time of great apostasy in Israel and Judah, see 2 Kings 14–16 for the context of Hosea's day

Main Themes in Hosea

1. Hosea's failed marriage and children are metaphors for Israel's relationship with Yahweh: Chs. 1–3
2. Israel has abandoned the "knowledge" and "understanding" of Yahweh: 4:1, 6, 11, 14, 5:4
3. Idolatry and worshipping other gods is likened to "prostitution" with other gods: 4:10–15; 5:1–5
4. Israel has turned to Egypt and Assyria for political support instead of trusting in Yahweh > these will lead to destruction: 7:11, 8:7–14; 11:5–11; 11:12–12:1
5. If Israel repents, Yahweh will restore them: 5:15–6:3; 12:2–6; 14:1–8
 - After the exile, God will bring the messiah from the line of David to restore Israel: 3:1–5

Reading Joel

The Big Picture

- 1:1–20 Announcement of famine
- 2:1–11 Announcement of locust swarm
- 2:12–17 Call to repentance
- 2:18–27 Repentance will lead to restoration
- 2:28–32 Images of restoration: Holy Spirit, salvation
- 3:1–21 Yahweh's justice and restoration for all nations

Historical Context

Unknown: There are references to the Temple (1:9, 13; 2:17), but 3:1–3 refers to the exile as though it was in the past. The book's meaning does not seem to be tied to its historical context.

Main Themes in Joel

1. Israel is facing a drought, famine, and locust plague > Joel sees these events as instances of the "Day of Yahweh" the great day of judgment and salvation for Israel and the world: Chs. 1–2

- Note that all the calamities in Joel 1-2 correspond to the curses for breaking the covenant made at Mt. Sinai, see Deuteronomy 28]
2. Joel calls Israel to repentance: 2:12–14
 3. If Israel repents, then restoration will come:
 - the land will again become fruitful: 2:18–27
 - the Holy Spirit will bring new salvation: 2:28–32
 - Yahweh’s justice will come to all nations: 3:1–16
 - Jerusalem will be the center of a renewed creation: 3:17–21
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Reading Amos

The Big Picture

- 1–2 Judgment on Israel and all nations
- 3–6 3 Addresses + 2 Woes
- 7–9 5 Visions of Judgment on Israel + 1 Narrative
 - 7:1–9 3 Visions
 - 7:10–17 1 Narrative
 - 8:1–9:10 2 Visions
- 9:11–15 Images of restoration: Messiah, new creation

Historical Context

- Amos lived in the mid-700’s BC (same time as Hosea), a time of great apostasy in Israel and Judah; see II Kings 14–16 for general context.

Main Themes in Amos

1. Yahweh’s justice is coming on all nations, *especially* Israel and Judah: Chs. 1–2
 - Israel’s covenant status means they are *extra responsible for their* : 3:2f
 2. Yahweh is bringing judgment upon Israel for:
 - hypocritical worship: 3:14–15, 4:4–5, 5:4–6
 - social injustice: 4:1–3, 5:7, 10–13
 3. Amos calls them to repentance: 5:14–15
 4. Yahweh’s judgment will result in *Exile*: 5:27, 6:1–7, 7:10–17
 5. On the other side of judgment is restoration
 - A new Davidic ruler: 9:11–12
 - The people will be regathered to a flourishing land: 9:13–15
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Reading Obadiah

The Big Picture

verses 1–14 Justice for Edom's actions

verses 15–16 Justice for *all nations*

verses 17–21 Images of restoration: Land is reinhabited, kingdom of Yahweh

Historical Context

This prophecy relates to events right after Babylon destroyed and exiled Judah from 600–586BC. For the events, see II Kings 24–25.

Edom was a nation that lived to the East of Judah (in modern day Jordan), and plundered them after Babylon came through.

Main Themes in Obadiah

1. Edom's arrogance and injustice deserved judgment from Yahweh: vv. 1–14
 2. Edom's judgment become an example of Yahweh's justice that will be brought against all nations: vv. 15–16
 - NOTE: "Edom" (אֱדוֹם) has the same Hebrew letters as "humanity" ("Adam" אָדָם): the book is showing how God's judgment on 'Edom' is a picture of Yahweh's ultimate judgment on all 'humanity.'
 3. Yahweh's justice for all nations will result in the "kingdom of Yahweh": vv. 17–21
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Reading Jonah

The Big Picture

- 1 Jonah's disobedience + Pagan sailor's repentance
- 2 Jonah's feigned "repentance"
- 3 Jonah's "obedience" + Pagan Nineveh's repentance
- 4 Jonah's anger at Yahweh's grace

Historical Context

Not specified: Assyria was Israel's greatest threat from around 750–600BC. The story seems to be purposefully disconnected from any specific time period.

Main Themes in Jonah

1. Jonah the "Hebrew" (1:9), is disobedient (1:3), complacent (1:5), knows how to spout pietistic babble (1:9), would rather die than follow Yahweh's word (1:12)
2. The non-Israelite sailors are more responsive to Yahweh's power (1:10), and are quick to repent (1:14), and worship Yahweh (1:15–16).

3. Jonah's prayer of "repentance" (2:1-9) is a hodge-podge of quotations from the psalms (i.e. nothing original here) > Yahweh's response? Vomit (2:10)
 4. Jonah announces a half-hearted and (intentionally?) ambiguous sermon (3:1-4)
 5. The Ninevites believe (3:5), are quick to repent (3:7-9), along with the cows (!! , 3:7)
 6. Jonah is angry at Yahweh's grace (4:1-4), and would rather die than acknowledge Yahweh's grace toward outsiders (4:9-10).
 7. Yahweh's Question: Should I not have compassion on people who are not like you? (4:11)
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Reading Micah

The Big Picture

- 1-2 *Justice and Restoration: Cycle 1*
 - 1:2-2:11 Justice on Israel's sin
 - 2:12-13 Images of Restoration: Messiah, regathering to the land
- 3:1-4:7 *Justice and Restoration: Cycle 2*
 - 3:1-12 Justice on Israel's sin
 - 4:1-7 Images of Restoration: New temple, Torah to the nations, kingdom of Yahweh
- 4:7-5:4 *Images of Restoration*
 - 4:8-10 Israel will be rescued from exile
 - 4:11-13 Israel will not be defeated by the nations anymore
 - 5:1-4a The messiah from the line of David will come
 - + 5:4b-14 Justice for the nations
- 6:1-70 *Justice and Restoration: Cycle 3*
 - 6:1-16 Justice on Israel's sin
 - 7:1-20 A prayer for restoration

Historical Context

He lived around 750-700BC, and was a contemporary of Isaiah. See II Kings 17-20 for the general historical context.

Main Themes in Micah

1. Israel has broken the covenant by...
 - social injustice: 2:1-2, 3:1-4
 - corrupt leadership: 3:1-4, 9-12
 - rejecting Yahweh's prophets: 3:5-12
 - idolatry and sorcery: 5:10-15
2. Yahweh is bringing judgment on Israel and Judah: 1:2-7, 15;
3. Yahweh will bring restoration on the other side of judgment:
 - Regathering of the oppressed 2:12-13,
 - Restoration from exile and the Messiah 4:1-5:9
 - Forgiveness of sins and covenant renewal 7:14-20

Reading Nahum

The Big Picture

- 1:1–2:2 Alphabet Psalm + Justice on Nineveh
- 1:1–8 Yahweh’s justice on the nations
- 1:9–2:2 Justice on Nineveh = Salvation for Israel
- 2:3–13 Justice on Nineveh
- 3:1–18 Justice on Nineveh

Historical Context

The oppressive Assyrian empire (capital city = Nineveh) ruled the entire Ancient Near East for almost 500 yrs, and came crumbling down between 640–610BC. They had attacked Israel many times (see 2 Kings 16–20). Babylon was the nation that rebelled against and conquered Assyria in 610 BC.

Main Themes in Nahum

1. Yahweh is bringing justice against all nations: There is a broken Acrostic (i.e. Alphabet) Poem in 1:2–2:2
2. Nineveh is highlighted as an archetypal brutal oppressor of God’s people
 - They have plotted evil against Yahweh: 1:9–11
 - They have worshipped idols: 1:15
 - They are a violent and oppressive regime: 3:1–4, 18–19
3. Nineveh’s judgment will bring salvation for Israel: 1:15–2:2
4. Nahum’s words mark the fulfillment of earlier prophets’ predictions that Assyria would fall one day in the future: see Isaiah 10:5–34, Micah 5:5b–6

Note: Yahweh’s judgment against Assyria is used here as *one specific example* of Yahweh’s universal justice working itself out among all the nations (i.e. Nahum 1:1–8).

Reading Habakkuk

The Big Picture

- 1:2–4 Habakkuk’s 1st complaint: Where is Yahweh in the midst of a violent world?
- 1:5–11 Yahweh’s 1st answer: I’m raising up the Babylonians to bring order and justice.
- 1:12–2:1 Habakkuk’s 2nd complaint: But Babylon is just as bad as the other nations!
- 2:2–20 Yahweh’s 2nd answer: Babylon itself will face judgment; you must be patient and wait for the outworking of my plan.
- 3:1–19 Habakkuk’s prayer of response: I will trust in Yahweh’s plan to bring justice and restoration to the world.

Historical Context

He lived in the transition between the fall of the Assyrian empire at the hands of the Babylonian empire, i.e. in the late 600’s BC. The fall of Assyria was good news, but the rise of Babylon was bad news for Israel.

Main Themes in Habakkuk

1. Habakkuk struggles with the tension between:
 - (1) believing that Yahweh is just and is working out the plan of redemption in the world events of his day (2:14)
 - (2) recognizing the world is full of violence and injustice and it's hard to see how Yahweh is at work (1:2-4, 12-17)
 2. Yahweh's answer: "Trust in my plan and in my character. I keep my promises" (2:2-4)
 3. Habakkuk recalls Yahweh's deeds of the past (3:2)...
 - His fiery appearance at Mt. Sinai (3:3-7)
 - Judgment on Egypt and redemption from slavery (3:8-15)
 4. ...and based on God's past faithfulness, Habakkuk looks with hope into the future (3:16-19)
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Reading Zephaniah

The Big Picture

- 1-3:7 The day of Yahweh's justice against all nations and Israel
- 1:2-3 Day of Yahweh against all nations
- 1:4-2:3 Day of Yahweh against Judah
- 2:4-15 Day of Yahweh against Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Assyria
- 3:1-7 Justice on Jerusalem
- 3:8-20 Justice and Restoration

Historical Context

The prophet lived in the reign of Judah's last good king (Josiah, in the late 600's BC), but saw that Israel was still corrupt. See 2 Kings 21-23 for the general context.

Main Themes in Zephaniah

1. Yahweh's justice is working itself out among *all nations*
 - Israel and Judah: 1:4-13
 - All the surrounding nations: 2:4-15
 - "Day of Yahweh" is part of bringing justice in historical events of Zephaniah's day: 1:14-2:3
 2. Yahweh's justice will result in restoration and renewal for *all nations*: 3:8 is the hinge-piece of the book: after judgment comes restoration and healing
 - Yahweh's justice is a *purification* process (3:9)
 - Salvation for all nations (2:11; 3:9)
 - Restoration for Israel (3:10-20)
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****Interval:** Between Zephaniah and the final three books of the Twelve (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) the *exile has come and gone* (i.e. we've jumped from 600BC to 500BC). Haggai-Malachi all relate to the circumstances of the people *after* the exile, as they wait for the fulfillment of Yahweh's promises.

Reading Haggai

The Big Picture

- 1 Call to repent and rebuild the temple
- 2:1-9 Yahweh will glorify the temple
- 2:10-19 Yahweh will bless the temple if they repent
- 2:20-23 Yahweh will raise up an heir from David's line

Historical Context

The Israelites have returned from Babylonian exile and started rebuilding the temple around 530-520BC (70yrs after the exile). For the general context, see Ezra 1-6.

Main Themes in Haggai

1. Those who returned from exile have not been faithful to Yahweh, and have suffered the consequences (famine, drought): 1:2-11, 2:15-19
2. Yahweh promises that there is still a potential future for the fulfillment of his promises in and through Israel and the temple: 2:1-9, 20-23
 - The restoration of Yahweh's dwelling with his people: 2:7-9
 - The restoration of the Davidic, messianic kingship: 2:23

Reading Zechariah

The Big Picture

- 1:1-6 Call to repentance
- 1:7-6:8 Zechariah's visions
- 1:7-17 Vision #1: Yahweh will redeem Jerusalem
- 1:18-20 Vision #2: Yahweh will judge those opposed to God's people
- 2:1-13 Vision #3: Joshua will be the priest of the new temple in Jerusalem
- 3:1-10 Vision #4: The new temple will be built by God's initiative
- 4:1-14 Vision #5: Yahweh will judge evil among his people
- 5:1-4 Vision #6: The wicked among Israel will go back to Babylon
- 5:5-11 Vision #7: Yahweh is at work among the nations
- 6:1-15 Vision #8 [Joshua, the Messiah and the new temple]
- 7-8 Call to repent > Restoration
- 7:1-13 Call to true repentance
- 8:1-23 Images of restoration
- 9-14 Images of justice and restoration
- 9:1-8 Yahweh's justice against the nations
- 9:9-17 The messianic deliverer + salvation for Israel
- 10 Yahweh will re-gather Israel
- 11 Yahweh punishes evil leaders (= shepherds)
- 12 Salvation for Judah through David's line
- 13 Judgment on Judah's leader > restoration
- 14 Jerusalem restored > kingdom of Yahweh

Historical Context

The historical context is the same as Haggai; they were contemporaries.

Main Themes in Zechariah

1. Israel has returned from exile, but none of the ancient prophetic promises have yet come true
 - They still need to repent, like their ancestors: 1:2–6
 - They are still perpetrating social injustice: 7:9–10
 2. Yahweh's promises to restore Israel and the nations are still valid
 - Jerusalem and the Temple will be restored: 1:14–17, 2:3–5, 10–13
 - There will be *another* regathering of Israel: 10:1–12
 - There is still a hope for the future Messiah: 6:9–15, 9:9–10
 - Yahweh's kingdom will come on earth: 14:1–9
 3. Israel needs to repent if these promises are to come to pass: Chs. 7–8
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Reading Malachi

The Big Picture

- 1:2–5 Dispute #1 – Yahweh chose Israel and not Edom
1:6–2:9 Dispute #2 – Israel has defiled the rebuilt temple
1:6–14 Dispute with the **people** for lame sacrifices
2:1–9 Dispute with the **priests** for false instruction
2:10–17 Dispute #3 – Israel has been unfaithful by divorcing their wives
3:1–5 Dispute #4 – Israel questions Yahweh's justice
3:6–12 Dispute #5 – Israel is withholding offerings from the temple
3:13–18 Dispute #6 – Israel questions Yahweh's justice again
4:1–5 Remember the day of Yahweh, the future prophet, and the Torah

Historical Context

Malachi came some time after the people have returned from Babylon and the temple has been built, likely in the early 400's BC. See Ezra-Nehemiah for general context.

Main Themes in Malachi

1. Even though Israel has returned from exile, they still persist in rebellion
 - They are defiling the 2nd Temple with lame offerings: 1:6–14, 3–12
 - The priests are corrupt leaders: 2:1–9
 - They have practiced widespread divorce: 2:10–16
2. Yahweh calls them to repent/return: 3:6–7
3. Yahweh is bringing *another* act of judgment to purify Israel
 - A prophet-messenger will come before the great event of Yahweh's judgment and salvation; he will announce judgment: 3:1–4
 - This judgment will separate those who are loyal to Yahweh, and those who are not: 4:1–4
4. Concluding paragraph to the Prophetic Collection
 - 4:5–6 is a 'canonical conclusion' to the prophets, and functions similarly as Deut 34:10–12.
 - It reminds Israel to stay faithful to the terms of the Sinai covenant ('the Torah of my Servant Moses')...
 - ...but urges them to look forward to another 'Moses-like' prophet (Elijah) who will come before the day of Yahweh.

