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Gnu

The Bible's Forgotten Books **(FILE: MINOR PROPHETS FINAL)**

by Desmond Ford

Only a few who read the Bible devotionally concentrate on the Minor Prophets. From Hosea to Malachi are the forgotten books of Scripture. Go to any seminary library and compare the number of volumes written on the major prophets—Isaiah to Daniel—with the number on the Minor Prophets. It is like entering a desert after a fertile field. Yet some of the sweetest gospel verses of the whole Bible are to be found in these forgotten books.

Even their names have something to tell us about the Savior. The very first—Hosea—means deliver and comes from the same Hebrew root as Joshua and Isaiah—a root meaning Savior or deliverer. As Heb 4:8 shows, Jesus is just the Greek form of Joshua. (Thus the KJV reads “Jesus,” in this verse where later versions rightly put Joshua).

There are three prominent Joshuas in the Bible—Joshua, son of Nun; Joshua, son of Josedech, and Joshua (Jesus), son of Joseph and Mary. The first led Israel into the Promised Land—a task Moses, the representative of the law, could not do. The second led in the rebuilding of the temple of God at the time of the restoration. And the third does both—He leads us into our promised land and is the builder of the church, God's temple.

Isaiah is known as the gospel prophet. He has so much to say about the son who would be given, the child who would be born, the servant of the Lord, the one acquainted with sorrows and griefs for the sake of the world he came to redeem.

In the Minor Prophets, Hosea acted out the work of the Redeemer to come by betrothing to himself a sinful woman, one prone to stray, one ultimately redeemed on the understanding that henceforth she would be faithful to her Lord. Thus in the first three chapters of Hosea, we have the story of the prodigal wife and in some ways it is more complete than the story of the prodigal son. It is a fitting introduction to the rest of the book as it acts out what is later taught out—God's redeeming seeking love for the spouse who had been unfaithful to him.

Joel is a contraction of Jehovah is Elohim—i.e., Jehovah is God and points to Jesus (Jehovah saves) as God. As Jesus foretold Pentecost and the Day of the Lord (John 7:37-39 and Matthew 24), so does Joel (2:28; 1:15; 2:1,11,31; 3:14.)

Amos means “bearer” or “burden,” and thus points to Him who would bear the sin of the world away. See John 12:29. He was borne at Tekoa which is only a few miles from Bethlehem. He has no official status, being neither royal nor priestly. He is a rustic as

many judged Christ to be. Like Jesus he takes many figures from nature and his message is a call to righteousness lest judgment prove overwhelming and final.

Obadiah means “the servant of Jehovah,” and this is a title for Christ found constantly in the book of Isaiah. See Isaiah chapters 42, 52, 53.

Jonah means “dove,” and points to Him upon whom the Holy Spirit descended as a dove at the beginning of the Savior's ministry. Jonah was willing to be thrown into the deep lest the men in his immediate world (the ship) be destroyed and our divine Jonah went down to death to save the ship of the church—those who believe on him. Jonah took up his work on the third day after resurrection from the deep—so did Jesus. Jonah was unwilling to be thought of as a false prophet lest he lose his reputation but Jesus made himself of no reputation and was willing to be thought false. Thus he became a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief as men turned their faces from him and judged him accursed of God.

Micah means “Who is like Jehovah?” and thus parallels in meaning Michael, one of Christ's names (Rev 12:7-9), which means “who is like God?” Christ's words “a man's foes shall be those of his own household,” come from Micah 7:6.

Nahum means “consolation,” and this of course is one of the names of Christ. See Luke 2:25 and Philippians 2:1. The city of Capernaum called Christ's own city (Matthew 9:1) bears the name of Nahum—literally it means “the city of Nahum.” Nahum is the counterpart and complement of Jonah. To Moses God revealed his twofold character: “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and forgiving iniquity, and that will by no means clear the guilty.” See Ex 34: 6-7 for the complete description. In Jonah 4:2 we have the first side of the divine character dwelt upon but Nehemiah stresses the second. See 1:2-3

Habakkuk means “the wrestler,” and the book is a debate between the prophet and God as the prophet wrestles with his doubts. But when we come to the divine Wrestler in Gethsemane who in anguish contends with the Satanic temptation to flee from the penalty of his people's sins we find in him one who never doubted his Father's love and wisdom. Compare the wrestling of Jacob with Peniel for the first type of Christ's agony in Gethsemane. See Genesis 32. See also Daniel 9 where a prince of the house of Israel against whom no sin is recorded wrestles with God in prayer because of the sins of his nation.

Habakkuk might be called the grandfather of the Reformation, for it is here that we first find that phrase which books bearing Paul's name quote three times and which was the rallying cry of Martin Luther—“The just shall live by faith.” See Habakkuk 2:1-4.

Zephaniah means “Hidden by Jehovah,” or “Jehovah hides.” Both meanings find a fulfillment in Christ—the one hidden in the quiver of God (Isa 49:2), who was hidden by angels when men sought to kill him prematurely. See Luke 4:30. But the man Christ Jesus was really the God-man. God was hidden in his humanity.

Haggai means “festival” or “feast,” and reminds us that Christ is the antitype of all Israel's festivals. Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us. 1 Corinthians 5:7. He is our Pentecost, Atonement, our Sabbath and our Jubilee. No wonder Christ loved to set forth the gospel under the figure of a feast. See how many stories told by him or about him concern feasts. “A certain king made a great feast.” “... a certain man made a great feast.” “And it was the Passover, the feast of the Jews, and Jesus was there.” “Jesus also was invited to the marriage.” “Bring the fatted calf and kill it. Let us eat, and drink, and be merry.” “When you are invited by anyone to a marriage feast,” “... those who were ready went with him to the marriage feast.” “Now before the feast of the Passover when Jesus knew that his hour had come.”

Thank God that a feast and not a funeral best represents the joys of the message of God's grace. Christ is our Haggai—our feast of good things. In this book he is “the desire of all nations,” and the glory that was to fill the second temple and which ultimately will fill the earth at the time of the marriage supper of the lamb.

X Zechariah means “Jehovah remembers.” He is declared to be “the son of Berechiah,” and the grandson of Iddo. Berechiah means “Jehovah bless,” and Iddo “the appointed time”—thus putting the names together we have the key to the book. At the appointed time God remembers his people and blesses them. Even so “in the fullness of time God sent forth his son” (Gal 4:6), to bless us by turning us away from our iniquities (Acts 3:26).

When the New Testament Zechariah sang at the miraculous birth of his son, he embodied the meaning of his name in his song: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us ... that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, **and to remember his holy covenant**, the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.” Luke 1:68-75.

The Old Testament book of Zechariah was written about the time of the Restoration from Babylon, the time of the rebuilding of the temple which prefigured the Christian church to be built by Christ. See Matthew 16:18.

Malachi means "My Messenger," and foretells the Messiah, the Messenger of the covenant and his predecessor John the Baptist. The name also means "my angel," for the Hebrew word for angel signifies messenger and the same is true of the Greek word for angel. Christ is the angel of the covenant, the archangel called Michael though he is the eternal second Person of the Trinity. "No one has seen God (meaning the Father) at any time, but the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Jn 1:18. Christ is the messenger of the Father to this world and wherever in the Old Testament we read of God appearing it is Christ who is meant, the angel of the covenant. These events are known as theophanies or appearances of God.

- We have not gotten ^{far} ~~away~~ in our study of the forgotten books of the Bible—only as far as the first word of each—the titles. Let us give you in a nutshell the message of all of them. They consist of judgment and salvation, of controversy and consolation, of condemnation and comfort. No message of rebuke in the minor prophets is unattended by the word of promised forgiveness. The mercy of God is the great theme or keynote of the minor prophets as it is the subject of the New Testament and all the rest of Scripture.
- ✕ Because of our sins judgment comes. But God intends by it to turn our faces from this world to heaven that we might find the supreme good.

To whet your appetite, we append some of the verses from the minor prophets which most resonate in the heart of this writer whenever I turn to those pages. May they everlastingly ring in your hearts too.

Quote: Hosea 2:14-15,19,20; 6:6; 11:1,3,48,9; 14:4. Micah 6:36-8;7:8,18-19.

Having fed the soul on these sweets then meditate on the fact that the minor prophets begin with a love story in Hosea chapters 1-3 and then begin the message of the last book (Malachi) with the words "I have loved you." (See Malachi 1:2.)

Love is the essence always of God's message to man, even in the forgotten books of Holy Writ.