

God Has a Word for You in Your Darkest Season

It's unfortunate that the last 12 books of the Old Testament are tagged the "minor" prophets. The term was coined because these writings are short, not because they are unimportant. God's heart is powerfully revealed in the prophecies of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

These 12 short books are anything but minor. If you have never seriously studied them, I challenge you to start digging now. Just as Jesus chose 12 unsophisticated disciples to preach the glorious news of His kingdom, God chose these 12 obscure prophets to preach a message of hope during the darkest period of Israel's history.

When I am going through times of uncertainty, doubt, fear or hopelessness, I often turn to the "minors" to build my faith. These books of the Bible remind us of five important truths:

1. God uses insignificant people to speak for Him. Scholars know nothing about Obadiah, whose name simply means "God's servant." Habakkuk wrote powerful prophetic prayers, but we know nothing about his life or lineage. Little is known about Micah, yet he accurately prophesied the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Joel, as far as anyone knows, was a nobody—yet his words were quoted on the day of Pentecost.

The minor prophets remind us that spiritual anointing has nothing to do with social status, popularity or worldly prestige. God chooses the weak things of this world to shame those things that are strong.

2. God speaks even in the darkest times. The minor prophets wrote during a season when Israel was about to be invaded or during her captivity. The prophets brought harsh warnings and

forceful calls to repentance—reminding us that God is sovereignly at work when our enemies seem to be in charge.

Are you in despair about the moral or spiritual condition of our country? Don't assume God has turned out the lights and closed the doors on us. He wants to speak to us when circumstances are bleak. The minor prophets affirm that God wants to talk to us when it looks like it can't get any worse. Israel had been under 70 years of judgment, but God did not leave them to despair. He sent Zechariah to say, "I will return to Zion" (Zech. 8:3, NASB), and, "I will save you that you may become a blessing" (Zech. 8:13). When God's word breaks in, it changes everything!

3. God's promises never fail. The minor prophets spoke of coming redemption and restoration, but their words were followed by 400 "silent years" between the end of Malachi and the birth of Jesus. The prophets spoke of the regathering of Israel, the coming of the Savior and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. But the seed of His prophetic promise had to fall in the ground and die before it could bring forth fruit.

Remember: God's timing is different from yours. Even when God seems silent, what He said will come to pass. A breakthrough is on the way! Habakkuk wrote, "For the vision is yet for the appointed time. ... Though it tarries, wait for it; for it will certainly come, it will not delay" (Hab. 2:3).

4. There is always hope for the righteous. Even though the minor prophets predicted dire judgment, they also offered the hope of restoration. Through Amos, the Lord scolded Israel for her unjust ways, but then He promised Jerusalem, "I will also raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old" (Amos 9:11). There is light at the end of the tunnel if you are a follower of Jesus.

If you are discouraged because of backslidden friends, unsaved family members, dead churches or your own spiritual dryness,

you can take courage from the words of Habakkuk, who wrote, "Though the fig tree should not blossom and there be no fruit on the vines ... yet I will exult in the Lord" (Hab. 3:17-18). It's never as bad as it looks! God offers real hope to those who call on Him.

5. God's faithfulness never changes. The minor prophets reveal God's character with amazing depth. Hosea understood God views His relationship with us as a marriage covenant. Jonah discovered God's amazing compassion for sinners. Zephaniah reveals God's love is so intense that He rejoices over His people "with shouts of joy" (Zeph. 3:17).

But what is revealed most clearly by the "minors" is God's faithful commitment to us as His people, even when we go astray. These Old Testament prophets lived before the coming of Jesus, but they understood grace better than many of us do. Our gracious God wanted a relationship with us so much that He paid the ultimate price to change our hearts. I love the way Micah says it: "Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity ... ? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love" (Mic. 7:18).

If you have been in despair, tune your ear to what God is saying. Soak your mind in the message of the minor prophets, and let the Holy Spirit rekindle hope.

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