

(S) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. Today we will study three Minor Prophets in chronological order: Amos, Jonah and Hosea. They were contemporaries who proclaimed God's Word in the northern kingdom of Israel during the height of its power and prosperity during the eighth century B.C.

THE BOOK OF AMOS.

POINT 1. THE WRITER, RECIPIENTS AND DATE OF THE BOOK OF AMOS.

Amos is the third of the twelve Minor Prophets. Although he was a shepherd living south of Jerusalem, God called him to be a prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel. He proclaimed God's Word to another country and culture. This was not an easy task, because Amos lived and prophesied in the main religious centre of the northern kingdom of Israel, called Bethel. Although Bethel was the very place where God had appeared to Jacob, the ancestor of Israel (Gen 28), the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel had established the worship of God under the image of a calf at Bethel in order to prevent his people from going to the southern kingdom of Judah to worship God in the temple at Jerusalem. Thus the northern kingdom of Israel worshipped an idol, had an idolatrous altar, an idolatrous temple, an idolatrous priesthood and idolatrous sacrifices! Right in the heart of this idolatrous religious centre, Amos prophesied God's Word! The false priest of Bethel even accused Amos of conspiracy in order to get rid of Amos, but Amos boldly prophesied the final destruction of both the king and this false priest. Amos prophesied during the time of king Jeroboam II of Israel and of king Uzziah of Judah during the height and power of both kingdoms. He prophesied during the years 788-737 B.C.

POINT 2. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF THE BOOK OF AMOS.

First. Amos prophesied God's judgement on nations and Israel.

The main thrust of his prophecies was that God deals with the nations of the world according to a strictly ethical standard, namely, he punishes them for their transgressions. The key word in the first two chapters is "for three sins of a nation, even for four". Amos gained his audience by first condemning the surrounding nations and proclaiming the coming adversity that God would bring upon them. He began with the nation furthest away from Israel and came closer and closer until he condemned the nation of Israel and proclaimed the coming judgement of Israel, which God would soon bring upon them. In Amos 4:2 he says, "The time will surely come when you will be taken away with hooks, the last of you with fishhooks." He predicted that Israel would be sent into exile beyond Damascus. About 22 years after the reign of Jeroboam II, this prophecy was literally fulfilled and the northern kingdom of Israel was deported to Assyria.

Second. Amos prophesied against social injustice.

Amos preached in the Old Testament what James preached in the New Testament. They preached that faith in God without social justice is an empty faith. The faith of God's people must be proved by doing what is right and good and hating what is evil. Faith must be proved by maintaining justice in the courts. He preached against the ordinary people, against their oppression of the poor and needy (2:6), against sexual immorality and prostitution (2:7) and against the misuse of alcohol (2:8). He preached against the women, who were heartless and crushed the poor and needy (4:1). He preached against the powerful leaders of the country, who filled their houses and palaces with what they plundered from the poor people and looted in their wars (3:10; 5:11). And he preached against the judges in the country, who hated people who told the truth in court (5:10), who deprived the righteous of justice by taking bribes from the wicked, and who deprived the poor of justice because they could not pay bribes (5:12). He openly accused the judges of the country that they had turned justice into poison (6:12).

Third. Amos prophesied repentance and God's future salvation.

In Amos 4:6-12 God says that he had sent his present judgements on the nations and Israel in order that they would return to God. God's judgements are not simply intended to punish people, but also to motivate them to return to God! Instead of seeking the stupid idols of Bethel, people should seek the living God (5:4-15). If they do, they will live and have eternal life (4-6)! God calls people to "seek good, hate evil and maintain justice in the courts" (14-15). If they do this, perhaps God will have mercy on them. Amos prophesied that God would certainly have mercy on *the remnant* of Israel, that is, on *those who repent and turn to God*.

POINT 3. THE DIVISION OF THE BOOK OF AMOS.

The book of Amos may be given the title, "**Judgement and restoration of Israel.**"

It has four parts:

Part one: chapter 1:1 to 2:16. Judgement is at hand for the nations that have committed cruel deeds.

Part two: chapter 3:1 to 6:14. Therefore, judgement is at hand for the highly favoured nation of Israel.

Chapter 3 relates the verdict: Israel's privilege and responsibility (2-3). Only a remnant will be saved (11-12). Chapter 4 relates the justice of the verdict: In spite of God's present judgements, Israel has not returned to God (6-12). Chapter 5 relates the call to repentance: Israel must seek the Lord, seek what is good and maintain justice in the courts (14-15). Chapter 6 relates the adversities coming on the impenitent: People who are complacent and feel secure will go into exile first (1,7).

Part three: chapter 7:1 to 9:10. Visions of threatening judgement.

Part four: chapter 9:11-15. Promises of restoration.

THE BOOK OF JONAH.

POINT 1. THE WRITER, RECIPIENTS AND DATE OF THE BOOK OF JONAH.

The Bible does not tell us who wrote the book that tells the story of Jonah. It is possible that Jonah himself wrote it, because his prayer is recorded in the first person. But it is equally possible that another unknown, but inspired person recorded it. Jonah is the fifth of the twelve Minor Prophets. He lived in a town in Galilee, which means that the statement of the Pharisees in John 7:52, that there never was a prophet who came from Galilee, was not true!

Jonah was commissioned to proclaim God's Word to Nineveh. This was the capital of the great Assyrian Empire, which at that time was beginning to expand its boundaries to the West, until a half a century later it destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel (721 B.C.). Thus, like Amos, Jonah was another missionary prophet. His task was also not easy, because he had to proclaim his message to the most powerful nation at that time of history, to people with a different language and culture and to people who had no background knowledge of the living God. Jonah disliked the task that God had given him, probably because he feared that God would transfer his love from Israel to Assyria. So he boarded a ship and sailed in the opposite direction of Nineveh.

But even a prophet cannot escape from the living God. A storm overtook the ship and Jonah realised that it happened because he was fleeing from God. Jonah confessed his sin to God and was eventually thrown overboard in order to save the ship. He was swallowed up by a great fish. In the belly of the fish, Jonah prayed a stirring prayer to God. Finally he was vomited out on dry land. Jonah was given a second chance and he was once more commissioned to proclaim God's Word to Nineveh.

This time, Jonah obeyed and he preached, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned." The people of Nineveh repented. However, Jonah had not expected this and their repentance greatly disturbed him. He became angry, because he had secretly hoped that they would not repent and consequently be destroyed. Jonah built a shelter outside the city, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen (4:5). God caused a vine to spring up by itself and it gave shade to Jonah. Jonah was pleased with the vine. But after God had sent a worm to destroy the vine, Jonah was very angry. This showed that Jonah was inconsistent and utterly selfish. He was angry that God did not destroy Nineveh and he was angry because God destroyed the vine. God rebuked Jonah, because he more concerned with a vine than with a great city with 120 000 people!

The book of Jonah is not a myth, nor an allegory. What is written in the book really happened. Miracles like being swallowed up by a large fish and being vomited out on dry land belong to *history* and not to allegories. The Lord Jesus Christ himself teaches in Matthew 12:39-40 that Jonah was a historical person and what happened to him was a real historical event. 2 Kings 14:25 says that Jonah lived and prophesied just before or during the reign of Jeroboam II, that is, during the years 783-743 B.C.

POINT 2. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF THE BOOK OF JONAH.

First. God's mercy is not limited to one nation, namely Israel.

Not only the New Testament, but also the Old Testament teaches that God is concerned with all the nations that he created in the world. Already in Genesis 12:3, God promised that in one descendant of Abraham, he would bless all the families of people on earth! In the book of Jonah, God is gracious to the seamen and to the foreign nation of Assyria. These facts point to the New Testament revelation of God's plan.

Second. God's people have the duty to make God known to other people.

God sent Jonah to the Assyrian Empire so that they may know about the living God. 1 Peter 2:9-10 teaches that people, who before did not belong to God's people, but now belonged to God's people, should declare the praises of God who called them out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Third. God's plan for people cannot fail.

God's *first plan* for Jonah was to go and proclaim a message to Nineveh. Jonah disobeyed and failed to accomplish this plan. But according to Jonah 3:1, God had a *second plan* for Jonah, namely, to nevertheless go and proclaim his message to Nineveh. Jonah obeyed and God's plan was accomplished. God does not just have one plan for our lives. If we fail to accomplish his first plan for our lives, he has a second plan ready that is as good as his first plan! When we repent of our disobedience to his first plan, then God will have compassion, forgive us and give us another chance to serve him in his second plan. To put this in another way, the Sovereign God has the means to bring a person to the accomplishment of his plans. Because God is the Sovereign God in the universe, no one and nothing can cause him to fail to accomplish his plans on earth. In Isaiah 14:24,27 God says, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand. For the Lord Almighty has purposed and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?"

Fourth. God is gracious.

God's patience with sinners, like Jonah, and sinful nations, like the Assyrians, when he leads them to repentance, is contrasted with Jonah's impatience, when he desires to see God's destruction of wicked people. Jonah even got angry with God's patience! But God's patience is an expression of his love that wants to lead people to repentance. Jonah 2:8 says that people, who cling to worthless idols, will forfeit God's grace. But Jonah 4:2 says that people, who cling to the living God, will never forfeit God's grace. God's grace forgave the disobedience of Jonah and also forgave the past idolatry of the people of Nineveh.

Nevertheless, repentance in one generation of people does not guarantee salvation in the next generation! God forgave the people of Nineveh of that generation because they repented. But about a hundred years later, the prophet Nahum (ch.3) prophesied the imminent destruction of Nineveh, because of the sins of another generation living in Nineveh.

Fifth. Jonah himself is a type of Jesus Christ.

The only sign that Jesus gave to the unbelieving Pharisees and teachers of the law was the sign of Jonah (Mt 12:39-41). As Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days before he was rescued, likewise Jesus Christ would be dead for three days before he would be resurrected.

POINT 3. THE DIVISION OF THE BOOK OF JONAH.

The book of Jonah may be given the title, "**God's love contrasted with Jonah's anger.**"

It has four parts:

Chapter 1. Jonah's disobedience to God's commission and its results.

Chapter 2. Jonah's prayer from the belly of the fish and his release.

Chapter 3. Jonah's preaching to the people of Nineveh and their repentance.

Chapter 4. God's patience and love contrasted with Jonah's impatience and anger.

THE BOOK OF HOSEA.

POINT 1. THE WRITER, RECIPIENTS AND DATE OF THE BOOK OF HOSEA.

Hosea is the first of the twelve Minor Prophets. The name Hosea means *salvation*. Because Hosea speaks of the northern ten tribes as "the land" (1:2) and he calls the king of Israel "our king" (7:5), he was most probably a citizen of the northern kingdom of Israel, during the height of its kingdom under king Jeroboam II. Hosea worked in the northern kingdom of Israel and his prophecies were mainly directed to them. However, as prophet of the Lord, his prophecies at times were also directed against the southern kingdom of Judah (3:4-5). Hosea began his prophesying probably during the last part of the reign of Jeroboam II (783-743 B.C) and must have prophesied during the reign of the other kings of the northern kingdom. The reason why Hosea refrained from mentioning the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel was probably because they were usurpers, illegitimate kings. Instead he mentioned the legitimate kings of the house of David: Uzziah, Jotham and Ahaz, who ruled in Judah. Hosea probably witnessed the exile of the northern kingdom to Assyria in 721 B.C., just as Jeremiah witnessed the exile of Judah to Babylon in 586 B.C. He probably prophesied till the beginning of the reign of Hezekiah. Thus, Hosea probably prophesied in the period 754-714 B.C. The book of Hosea consists of a collection of many prophecies made over a long period of time. They are arranged chronologically in more or less four periods of time.

POINT 2. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF THE BOOK OF HOSEA.

First. Hosea's bitter experience dramatically portrays the Lord's relationship to Israel.

The prophet Hosea had married a certain woman called Gomer. But his wife was unfaithful to him and she became a *wife of prostitution*. She went after other lovers and conceived *children of prostitution*. The first child was a boy and was named "Jezreel". Just as God destroyed the royal house of the wicked king Ahab at Jezreel (2 Ki 9-10), likewise he would again avenge the wickedness and unfaithfulness of the present kings of Israel. The second child was a girl and was named "Lo-Ruhamah", which means, *not loved*. Because of Israel's unfaithfulness to God, God would no longer

show love to Israel. The third child was a boy and was named “Lo-Ammi”, which means *not my people*. Because of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God, God would no longer be Israel’s God and Israel would no longer be God’s people. If the woman, who was called an adulteress in chapter 3:1 was Gomer, then instead of rejecting her totally, Hosea bought her back for himself and restored her former position of honour. Although chapters 1 and 3 are presented as actual history, they nevertheless have symbolic significance: Just as Hosea had married Gomer, so the Lord had become Israel’s ‘Husband’. Just as Gomer had become unfaithful to Hosea, so Israel had become unfaithful to the Lord. Just as Gomer was enslaved by her lovers, so Israel would be enslaved by the very nations in which she had put her trust. Just as Hosea restored Gomer as his honourable wife, so the Lord would restore Israel’s remnant as his true people. Just as Hosea redeemed Gomer with the price of silver and barley, so Jesus Christ would redeem the true Israel with the price of his own precious blood.

Second. Gomer’s sin, punishment and restoration serve as a symbol of Israel’s sin, punishment and restoration.

Because each of the four parts of the book Hosea covers the same themes, “sin, punishment and restoration”, the book has a cyclical or parallel arrangement, just as the first letter of John and the book of Revelation in the New Testament.

Third. The main theme of Hosea’s preaching is the tender, yearning love of God for his own people.

This is best summarised in Hosea 2:14, where God says, “I will speak tenderly to her.” And in Hosea 11:4, “I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love.” And in Hosea 14:4, “I will heal their backsliding and love them freely.”

POINT 3. THE DIVISION OF THE BOOK OF HOSEA.

The book of Hosea may be given the title, “**Israel’s sin, punishment and restoration.**”

It has four cyclical parts:

The first cycle: chapter 1:1 to 3:5. Gomer’s sin, punishment and restoration are considered as a symbol.

Sin: Gomer was unfaithful to her husband (1:2-9).

Punishment: Gomer was stripped naked, her lewdness was exposed before the eyes of her lovers and she was deserted by her lovers (2:2-13).

Restoration: Gomer would be bought back by her husband (1:10 to 2:1, 2:14-23 and 3:1-5).

The second cycle: chapter 4:1 to 6:3. The emphasis is on those who sin, who will be punished and who will be healed.

Sin. A degenerated nation, degenerated priests and degenerated worship (4:1-14).

Punishment. Both Israel and Judah will fall. The day of reckoning is close (4:15 to 5:9).

Restoration. No healing without the Lord (5:10 to 6:3).

The third cycle: chapter 6:4 to 11:11. The emphasis is on the sins, punishments and restoration of Israel.

Sin: Israel is in league with criminals, murderers, foreign nations, and breakers of God’s covenant (6:4 to 8:14).

Punishment. Israel will be carried away in exile, become childless and be completely destroyed (9:1 to 10:15).

Restoration. God’s love does not give up his people (11:1-11).

The fourth cycle: chapter 11:12 to 14:9. The emphasis is on the grievous character of sins, the severity of the punishments and the grace of restoration.

Sin. In spite of God’s faithfulness, Israel has become unfaithful. In spite of God’s revelation to Jacob, Israel worships idols at Bethel. In spite of God’s leading Israel out of Egypt, Israel copies the morals of Egypt (11:12 to 12:14).

Punishment. God’s punishment will be swift as early dew disappears. It will be terrible as wild animals tearing people apart. It will be relentless bringing death without compassion (13:1-16).

Restoration. God will heal their backslidings and love them freely (14:1-9).

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. During the next week, read Habakkuk, Obadiah and Haggai. Next week we will introduce them.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and preach God’s Kingdom” and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.