
BOOK OVERVIEW

Hosea

Author: Hosea (means “salvation”)

Date: 785-725 B.C.

Recipients: primarily Israel, the Northern Kingdom, sometimes called Ephraim; and some warnings to Judah

Key words: whoredom (14 times)

Summary: Hosea presents Israel as God’s unfaithful “wife,” who He will chasten but eventually restore.

Key verses: Hosea 3:1; 2:13-14

Notes:

Hosea was a contemporary of Amos and Micah in Israel, and Isaiah in Judah. He was younger than Amos but older than Micah.

God tells Hosea to take to himself an adulterous woman, Gomer, and her children (Hosea 1:2), as an illustration of Israel’s idolatrous relationship with idols.

Hosea does so and Gomer gives him three children; but, then, she returns to her adulterous life.

Finally, God instructs Hosea to restore Gomer to her rightful position of his wife, just as God planned to restore Israel, after they turned from their idolatry and back to Him.

A notable quote from this book: “...for they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind” (Hosea 8:7)

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Jonah

Author: The prophet Jonah (means “a dove”)

Date: 820-804 B.C. (date uncertain)

Recipients: While Jonah’s account focuses on Nineveh, his message was probably for the Northern Kingdom.

Key words: prepared (4 times)

Summary: The wicked city of Nineveh repents and turns to God under the reluctant preaching of God’s prophet Jonah.

Key verse: Jonah 3:10

Notes:

This is one of the most controversial books in the Old Testament primarily because of its miraculous story. Some critics view it as a myth, allegory, or parable. Those same critics reject the fact that Jesus was in the tomb three days and three nights before rising from the dead.

Clearly, Jesus accepted the book as truth. His references to Jonah are found in Matthew 12:38-41, 16:4; and Luke 11:29-32.

The book makes it clear that God’s compassion was not just for the Jews but extended to the Gentiles.

The Greek word that is translated “whale” in Matthew 12:40 (KJV) is more accurately rendered as “big fish” or “large sea creature,” as is done in Jonah 1:17 (KJV).

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Joel

Author: Joel (means “Jehovah is God”)

Date: uncertain, but possibly early 837-756 B.C.

Recipients: the inhabitants of Judah

Key words: Day of the Lord (5 times)

Summary: After a plague of locusts, a sign of God’s impending judgement, the people are urged to turn back to God.

Key verses: Joel 2:28-32

Notes:

The utter devastation by the “army” of locusts is symbolic of the thoroughness with which God will judge in righteousness.

The invasion of locusts and severe drought are symbolic of the armies of Judah’s enemies that will invade and destroy the nation.

In Joel 1:4 four different Hebrew words are used to describe the locust. It is unknown whether these words describe different kinds of locusts or describe the locust at various stages in their development.

Joel 2:28-32 speaks of the outpouring of God’s Spirit which we see come to reality in the book of Acts—the beginning of the Church and the spread of the Gospel. It’s as if Paul in Acts 16:31 is quoting Joel 2:32A.

Chapter three foreshadows future deliverance and the millennial reign of Christ.

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Amos

Author: Amos (means “burden”)

Date: 810-785 B.C., during the reign of Uzziah (Southern Kingdom) and Jeroboam (Northern Kingdom)

Recipients: Israel, the Northern Kingdom

Key words: transgression (12 times), transgress (1 time), “I will not turn away the punishment thereof” (8 times)

Summary: The coming judgement of God on sin, both of Jews and Gentiles.

Key verses: Amos 4:11-12

Notes:

Amos was a contemporary Hosea and possibly Joel and Jonah.

Although the people of Israel were enjoying material prosperity, they had fallen away from their commitment to God. Amos specifically identifies their sins as idolatry, luxury, revelry, debauchery, oppression, extortion, bribery, and injustice.

Amos 6:4 speaks of “beds of ivory.” Ivory was not native to Palestine, but was cherished by wealthy Jews. It has been found at many archaeological sites.

Chapters 1-2 present God’s inevitable judgement on six Gentile nations and ends with His judgement on Judah and Israel.

The book ends with the promise of future blessing for Israel. (Amos 9:11-15)

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Obadiah

Author: Obadiah (means “worshiper of Jehovah”) This is a common name but apparently has no connection with any other Obadiah mentioned in the Old Testament.

Date: 586-585 B.C.

Recipients: Edom, south of the Dead sea (The nation that originates from Esau)

Key words: Edom & Esau (9 times), “cut off” (3 times)

Summary: The book warns the Edomites of the judgement of God that is to come upon them because of their pride and malicious treatment of Judah.

Key verse: Obadiah 15

Notes:

Edom has many mountains over 5,000 feet. Some Edomites cut dwellings out of the stone bluffs, which Obadiah refers to in verses three and four. Petra, which is now in Southern Jordan, is located in the area which was once controlled by the Edomites.

Egypt also utilized the area for the mining of copper.

King David conquered Edom (II Samuel 8:14), but by 734 B.C. it was under the control of Assyria.

Obadiah is one of the few prophets who is not quoted in the New Testament.

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Date: 749-697 B.C. (he was contemporary with Hosea and Isaiah)

Recipients: He addresses both the Southern and the Northern Kingdoms.

Key words: hear (9 times), gather/assemble (9 times), desolation (4 times)

Summary: Micah proclaims God’s judgement on all of Israel and its restoration through God’s grace.

Key verses: Micah 6:8

Notes:

Micah’s home, Moresheth, was located just a few miles west of Gath. Today, its exact location is uncertain.

It is from Micah 5:2 that Herod’s advisers determined that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, King David’s birthplace (John 7:42). Much of the story of Ruth also took place there.

Beating “swords into plowshares” (4:3) speaks of a time of peace, quite the opposite of Joel 3:10 where plowshares were beaten into swords. In those days plows did not have plowshares as we know them but simply had a metal tip.

Micah may have walked the streets of Jerusalem barefoot as a sign of mourning, much like wearing sackcloth and ashes. (1:8)

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Nahum

Author: The prophet Nahum (means “comforter”)

Date: 630 B.C. (About 100 years after Nineveh turned to God in response to the preaching of Jonah)

Recipients: Primarily Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Judah is also promised deliverance from Assyria.

Key words: vengeance (revenge) (3 times)

Summary: Nahum declares God’s coming judgement on the sin of Nineveh and the reason for that judgement.

Key verses: Nahum 3:5-7

Notes:

The location of Nahum’s home, Elkosh, is not known today.

The fortified walls of Nineveh enclosed about 1,700 acres.

The city palace covered about three large city blocks.

In the midst of Nahum’s declaration of God’s anger against sin, he reminds his hearers that God is good to those who trust Him. (Nahum 1:7)

The book of Nahum is basically two poems: the first focuses on the greatness of God; the second on the destruction of Nineveh.

Nineveh fell in 612 B.C.

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Habakkuk

Author: The prophet Habakkuk (means “embrace”)

Date: 610-599 B.C. (Just before the Babylonian captivity)

Recipients: Not indicated, but probably Judah.

Summary: The book shows the holiness and righteousness God, Who must and will punish sin.

Key verses: Habakkuk 2:4

Notes:

The Bible tells us nothing else about Habakkuk and his life.

Habakkuk 2:4 contains the classic theme of the Reformation, “the just shall live by faith.” (Romans 1:17)

Jehoiakim was probably king in Judea as Habakkuk was prophesying.

Habakkuk asks God two questions: First, “Why aren’t the wicked men of Judah punished?”(1:1-4) God answers by saying He will use the Chaldean’s to punish Judah. (1:5-11) Second, “Why use a wicked nation like the Chaldeans to punish Judah?” (1:12-2:1) God answers that in the end the Chaldeans will also be judged. (2:2-20)

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Author: The prophet Zephaniah (means “He whom Jehovah has hidden”)

Date: 630 B.C. (during King Josiah’s reign and after the Northern Kingdom—Israel—was taken into captivity)

Recipients: Judah and Jerusalem.

Summary: Zephaniah warns of impending judgment and comforts the faithful remnant.

Key verses: Zephaniah 1:7, 12

Key words: Day of the Lord (20), desolation (7), remnant (4)

Notes:

Zephaniah was probably the great-great-grandson of Judah’s king Hezekiah. Apparently, Zephaniah was familiar with the political leaders of Judah.

The book foreshadows “The Day of the Lord” mentioned in the New Testament, when God will reestablish His kingdom on earth.

The book makes it clear that the worship of God and idolatry do not mix. (1:4-6)

Pagan offerings were often made on altars that were erected on rooftops. (1:5)

Tradition says that Zephaniah was associated with Huldah the prophetess (II Chronicles 34:20-30) and Jeremiah in the initiation of the reformation of the kingdom.

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Haggai

Author: The prophet Haggai (means “my feast”)

Date: Between August and December 520 B.C.

Recipients: The Jews in Jerusalem, especially their governor Zerubbabel and Joshua the High Priest

Summary: Haggai encourages those in Jerusalem to finish rebuilding the temple.

Key verses: Haggai 1:14; 2:9

Key words: The Lord’s house (this house, mine house, etc.) (8), consider (5)

Notes:

Zerubbabel left Babylon for Jerusalem with almost 50,000 Jews in 538 B.C. (Ezra 2:64)

Haggai prophesied several years after the Jews had returned to Jerusalem from exile. They had laid the foundation of the second temple (Ezra 3:10), but they were opposed by the local inhabitants, became discouraged, and stopped their work.

Although the temple was unfinished, the Jews had built nice homes for themselves. (1:4, 9)

Because of Haggai’s notes, this is one of the most precisely dated books in the Bible.

According to Jewish tradition, Haggai was a Levite.

BOOK OVERVIEW

Haggai

Author: The prophet Haggai (means “my feast”)

Date: Between August and December 520 B.C.

Recipients: The Jews in Jerusalem, especially their governor Zerubbabel and Joshua the High Priest

Summary: Haggai encourages those in Jerusalem to finish rebuilding the temple.

Key verses: Haggai 1:14; 2:9

Key words: The Lord’s house (this house, mine house, etc.) (8), consider (5)

Notes:

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BOOK OVERVIEW

Zechariah

Author: the prophet Zechariah (his name means “Jehovah remembers”)

Date: 520-518 B.C.

Recipients: The Jews in Jerusalem who had returned from Babylon.

Summary: Haggai prompts those in Jerusalem to finish rebuilding the temple.

Key verses: Zechariah 9:9-10

Key words: The Word of the Lord (my words) (14), The Lord of hosts (52)

Notes:

Zechariah wrote 18 years after the Jews had returned to Jerusalem from Babylon.

Zechariah’s grandfather, Iddo, was a priest who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel.

Darius was the king in Babylon at the time Zechariah prophesied. (This is not the Darius of Daniel’s day. He was a Mede. The Darius of Zechariah’s day was a Persian.)

Chapters 1-6 include ten visions that Zechariah received from God.

Chapters 9-11 are prophetic of Christ’s first coming and His rejection by His people.

Chapters 12-14 are prophetic of Christ’s second coming when He will be accepted by the Jews and set up His kingdom.

According to the Talmud, he was a member of the Great Synagogue, the antecedent of the Sanhedrin.

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BOOK OVERVIEW

Malachi

Author: the prophet Malachi (his name means “my messenger” or “messenger of Jehovah”)

Date: 445-397 B.C.

Recipients: The Jews in Jerusalem who had returned from Babylon.

Summary: Malachi writes about God’s faithfulness and his people’s faithlessness.

Key verses: Malachi 3:9-10

Key words: ye say (11 times)

Notes:

The temple worship had become nothing more than mere ritual rather than the true worship of God.

Some believe that Malachi is not a person’s name, but a title. The Septuagint, the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament, renders verse 1 as, “The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by the hand of his messenger.”

The book is a departure from the typical prophetic approach, “Thus saith the Lord,” to more of a conversation between God and His people, “But you ask.”

The book is quoted several times in the New Testament: Matthew 11:10, 14; Mark 1:2; Luke 1:17; Romans 9:13.

Fuller’s soap (launderer’s soap) in 3:2 was used for cleansing and “fulling” (shrinking or thickening) new wool cloth.

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