

THE BIG READ (37)

Jesus in the Book of the Twelve (Part 1)

A. Introduction

1. Every book of the Bible has one dominating theme – Jesus is the Christ.

“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”
(Luke 24:45-47)

Jesus is the Christ who will suffer and die.

Jesus is the Christ who will rise from the dead on the third day.

Jesus is the Christ who will forgive the sins of all who repent.

Jesus is the Christ who will be preached to the nations.

2. The Old Testament that Jesus read contained the same 39 books as our English Bibles but was arranged in a different order.

It had three sections – the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

“Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” (Luke 24:44)

The Law (of Moses) contains the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

The second section, the Prophets, was divided into two parts:

The Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings) gives us God’s perspective on the history of Israel from the conquest of the Promised Land until their exile from it.

The Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Book of the Twelve) explains why the history of Israel turned out the way it did.

3. The final book of the Prophets section is the Book of the Twelve, the last of the Latter Prophets.

The Book of the Twelve is sometimes known as the Minor Prophets, not because they are of less importance, but because of their length (they are shorter).

With the Book of the Twelve, the total number of Latter Prophets in the Hebrew Old Testament is fifteen.

This is not a coincidence, because it matches the number of Patriarchs and Tribes of Israel (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, The Twelve Tribes).

The Latter Prophets should be seen, therefore, as an Israel within Israel, calling the larger nation to repent and turn back to God.

B. Getting Started with the Book of the Twelve

1. What is the Book of the Twelve?

The Book of the Twelve contains twelve prophetic writings that were collected and put together into one book.

The English Bible treats them as 12 separate books, but in the Hebrew Old Testament that Jesus read, it is a single book.

2. Which prophetic writings make up the Book of the Twelve?

The twelve prophetic writings are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Three of these prophets spoke to the northern kingdom of Israel prior to the Assyrian exile: Jonah, Hosea, and Amos.

Six of these prophets spoke to the southern kingdom of Judah prior to the Babylonian exile: Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Joel, and Obadiah.

Three of these prophets spoke to the Judah after the time of exile was over: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

In the Book of the Twelve the prophetic writings do not appear in chronological order.

<u>Biblical Sequence</u>	<u>Chronological Sequence</u>
Hosea	Jonah (ca. 770BC)
Joel	Amos (ca. 760BC)
Amos	Hosea (ca. 760-730BC)
Obadiah	Micah (ca. 737-690BC)
Jonah	Nahum (ca. 650BC)
Micah	Habakkuk (ca. 630BC)
Nahum	Zephaniah (ca. 627BC)
Habakkuk	Joel (ca. 600BC?)
Zephaniah	Obadiah (ca. 586BC?)
Haggai	Haggai (ca. 520BC)
Zechariah	Zechariah (ca. 520-518BC)
Malachi	Malachi (ca. 450BC)

3. Why have these prophetic writings been arranged in this order?

The reason appears to be to sum up and stress the big message seen in the three Major Prophets, and this provides a fitting conclusion to the Prophets section of the Old Testament.

The message of the 12, like those of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, is straightforward.

Israel and the nations have sinned against God. Unless they repent and turn back to God they will be punished for their sin. After this, God will restore a remnant of Israel and offer mercy and salvation to the nations through a coming King like David.

These three themes of sin, punishment, and mercy, are found in each of the prophetic writings that make up the Book of the Twelve.

However, these prophetic writings have been arranged in the order they have, to group them according to the particular theme addressed more intently by the writings.

Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah focus on the general and specific sins of Israel and Judah. The punishment for sin is seen as something in the distant future.

Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah contain detailed promises regarding the Day of the LORD for Israel and the nations.

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi concern is mercy and restoration.

4. How should we read the Book of the Twelve?

You can read the Book of the Twelve either as 12 separate books or as one single book.

When you read the Book of the Twelve as 12 separate books, the focus becomes on what the message of that prophetic writing was, for the original hearers, at the time the prophecy was given.

It breaks down into two sections.

Chapters 1:1-2:17: A summons to repent

Chapters 2:18-3:21: A promise for the repentant

4. Amos exposes the transgressions of Israel and this was seen in the way they had rejected God's Word by oppressing the poor and needy members of God's people, making them like the surrounding nations.

"This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed." (Amos 2:6-7)

It breaks down into two sections.

Chapters 1:1-9:10: The LORD Roars

Verses 9:11-15: The LORD Restores

5. Obadiah gives a warning against pride, which was the reason for the nation of Edom's destruction.

"See, I will make you small among the nations; you will be utterly despised. The pride of your heart has deceived you, and you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, 'Who can bring me down to the ground?'" (Obadiah 2-3)

It breaks down into two sections.

Verses 1-16: God's enemies will be destroyed

Verses 17-21: God's people will be delivered

6. Jonah highlights the failure of Israel to be a light to the nations, as rather than extending God's compassion, Israel hated Assyria and wanted its destruction.

"When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened. But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity." (Jonah 3:10-4:2)

It breaks down into two sections.

Chapters 1-2: Mercy for the Prophet in the Great Sea

Chapters 3-4: Mercy for the People in the Great City

7. Micah announces the guilt of Judah and Israel by picturing Jerusalem and Samaria, the civil and religious leaders, and then whole nation, in God's courtroom and their guilt because of their failure to keep the covenant is made clear.

"Hear, O mountains, the LORD's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the LORD has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel." (Micah 6:2)

It breaks down into three sections.

Chapters 1-2: The Capital Cities are charged by God

Chapters 3-5: The Leaders are charged by God

Chapters 6-7: The Whole Nation is charged by God

8. What message do these six prophetic writings give to God's people as they read them together?

Repent and return to the LORD.

Learn from the mistakes of God's people in the past.

This is your only hope.

Otherwise you will face God's judgment when the Day of the LORD comes.

It is clear that most of God's people by the time of Malachi had not learnt from the mistakes of the past and returned to God in repentance.

"I have loved you," says the LORD. "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?'" (Malachi 1:2)

The focus of these prophetic writings might primarily be the sins of Israel and Judah, but that does not mean there are no glimpses of hope in them.

D. Jesus in the Book of the Twelve

1. In Hosea, Jesus is the faithful lover who calls us to come back, even after we have abandoned Him.

"The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes." (Hosea 3:1)

"How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused." (Hosea 11:8)

2. In Joel, Jesus is the Name upon whom everyone who calls will be saved and will receive the Holy Spirit.

"And afterwards, I will pour out my Spirit on all people... And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls." (Joel 2:28, 32)

3. In Amos, Jesus is King who will restore David's kingdom, but this time it will be a worldwide kingdom of blessing and security.

"In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name," declares the LORD, who will do these things. "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the reaper will be overtaken by the ploughman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills. I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the LORD your God." (Amos 9:11-15)

4. In Obadiah, Jesus is the LORD who judges the nations and whose Kingdom will cover the whole earth.

"The day of the LORD is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head." (Obadiah 15)

"People from the Negev will occupy the mountains of Esau, and people from the foothills will possess the land of the Philistines. They will occupy the fields of Ephraim and Samaria, and Benjamin will possess Gilead. This company of Israelite exiles who are in Canaan will possess the land as far as Zarephath; the exiles from Jerusalem who are in Sepharad will possess the towns of the Negev. Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the LORD's." (Obadiah 19-21)

5. In Jonah, Jesus is the Saviour who offers mercy to all nations through His death and resurrection.

"Salvation comes from the LORD." (Jonah 2:9)

"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here." (Matthew 12:40-41)

"But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?" (Jonah 4:11)

6. In Micah, Jesus is the ruler born in Bethlehem who is everything the nation is not, and who will save a remnant.

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." (Micah 5:2)

"He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry for ever but delight to show mercy." (Micah 7:18)

ⁱ Some of the outlines are taken or adapted from *Old Testament Introduction Lectures* by David Murray or *One Lord, One Plan, One People* by Rodger Crooks