

God's Plan in the Minor Prophets

God's Plan in Scripture

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As a subset of our annual theme Planning to Grow, we're talking about God's Plan in Scripture, continuing that series. Today we're talking about the Minor Prophets. The first week we introduced the series in the following ways: we wanted to say God's plan may be like a little more robust way, say it like a seminarian: God's plan is to manifest the fullness of his glory to his creation by establishing his kingdom, his rule, upon the earth in which he dwells with his people through Christ the King for eternity. If you're going to narrow it down to just a few words: Jesus revealed in Scripture and then obviously if it were just one word, it's all about, say it with me, Jesus. Pastor Viars also emphasized the threefold division of creation, fall and redemption and we'll see those themes again today.

The second week, I took you on a tour of the Pentateuch where the Pentateuch is a book of origins of human history including how man is to relate to God. The third week, Pastor Rob Green took us on an overview of the Historical Books. The fourth week, Pastor Viars led us through a discussion of the Poetical Books. If you love the poetry, the prophets today is all about poetry as well. Last week, Trey helped us to understand the message of the Major Prophets which was also one word. Do you remember that one word? Repent. Some of you remember it, good job, maybe you repented this week. If not, repent this next week.

This morning I have the opportunity to conclude our time in the Old Testament with an overview of the Minor Prophets. I do say "conclude," but in the Old Testament there really is no conclusion. Remember back when I spoke to you about the Pentateuch, I spoke to you about the opening lines of a good story that set the trajectories of where the story would go. A good story also has a conclusion that neatly ties up all the loose ends. That's not the way it is with the Old Testament. There is no conclusion. You know, imagine a good story or a not so good story in contrast, imagine if you will, what if Cinderella, the movie, ended up by the Prince accidentally dropping the glass slipper and saying, "Oh well, it was a nice night. I had a good dance. I'm moving on. Servant, come and clean this up." How would you like that? Not so great. What if Snow White and the Seven Dwarves, Prince Charming got lost in the woods never seeing Snow White in the glass casket. The Old Testament began with God dwelling with mankind in Paradise

sanctuary. The Old Testament ends with God's glory gone and his people mired in sin. Great story. Not.

If you will, please turn in your Bibles to the last 38 pages of the front section of your Bibles. That is the Minor Prophets, specifically page 640-678. I want you to park on page 640, right in Hosea 1. All that Pastor Trey said last week about the Major Prophets is true of the Minor Prophets as well. The Minor Prophets are only minor because they are shorter books. In one sense, we can say the best books we've ever read were short and had pictures, right? That's my kind of book. So, these can become your favorite as well. They are short, they don't have pictures unless you have a child's Bible, they have pictures, I suppose.

What are the Minor Prophets? The Minor Prophets are the last 12 smaller books in the Old Testament beginning with Hosea and ending in Malachi. They are typically called "The Twelve." If you call them "The Twelve," we'll know what you're talking about. The Twelve is framed with wisdom themes. I think that may be your first blank there. The Twelve is framed with wisdom themes. What does that mean, Brent? That means the authors put a little verse at the beginning and the end of these 12 books that says, "These books are good for your instruction. If you know these books, you'll be wise." They're like Proverbs. You will be wise.

Hosea 14:9, the last verse of the first book of The Twelve says, "Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; Whoever is discerning, let him know them." Same kind of thing with Malachi. The last book has wisdom themes and the end, "those who fear the Lord." "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord." Where have we heard that before? Tell me? In the Book of Proverbs. My point is this: the beginning of the Minor Prophets and the end of the Minor Prophets are bookend with wisdom themes which tells you that this is instruction for God's people to learn his ways so you can become more wise as you study these books and there's only 38 pages, you could read them drinking your Starbucks this afternoon. Okay? So, I know that's what you're planning.

Now, let's talk about content and context for just a moment, or actually an extended moment. If you will now, look at your bulletin notes, not the Power Point. I am not clicking through all of what's in your bulletin right at this moment in time. There are a lot of dates, there are a lot of things like that. Over the last three weeks, our Pastors have given you a line of important dates. I'm not going to rehearse all of those here, just a few.

The context of the Minor Prophets. Remember the division of Israel's kingdom occurred in 931 BC. Solomon oversaw the unification of the kingdom, David and Solomon, and in 931 division occurred. When division occurs, think sin. Say sin. Wherever there is division, separation, that's not a good thing. Sin is causing that so God's people were sinning. We'll see why that is the case in just a moment. You've heard it before, last week as well.

Hosea was the first of the Minor Prophets. Hosea was written around 753 BC and talks about the love of God manifested to a prostituting people. Some harsh terms there. Then it gets a little harsher. Let's read if you will, Hosea 1:1-9, page 640 in that chair Bible,

“The word of the LORD which came to Hosea the son of Beeri, during the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.” Knowing the dates of those kings gives us the dates of the prophet here. That's where we get the date. “When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, ‘Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD.’” Can you imagine God saying this? What was Hosea's initial thought? “God, are you serious? I mean, I was hoping to have a sweet little country girl from Kansas as my bride. I don't know about this plan.” God says, “Yes, you are to take a prostitute and when she goes off and prostitutes and maybe even has children by other husbands, I want you to divorce her and then I want you to take her back as a sign of your compassion.” “God, really? That's not the nice family that I was planning on. That is not the nice comfortable no chaos in my family that I was planning.” God says, “I know, but that's the family that I have.”

“So,” Hosea, “went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. And the LORD said to him, ‘Name him Jezreel.’” A great name, “for yet a little while, and I will punish the house of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.” Israel will die in Jezreel, therefore, I want you to name your son Jezreel.

“On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel. Then she conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. And the LORD said to him, ‘Name her Lo-ruhamah,’” which means no compassion, “for I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel, that I would ever forgive them. But I will have compassion on the house of Judah and deliver them by the LORD their God, and will not deliver them by bow, sword, battle, horses or horsemen.’ When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah,” no compassion, “she conceived and gave birth to a son. And the LORD said, ‘Name him Lo-ammi,’” which is Hebrew for “not my people.”

What is God doing? This is why you say, “This is weird. This is why I don't like the Minor Prophets. This is why I'm going to read Proverbs or an Epistle of Paul. That's right.” No, that's not right. You've heard of parables? Raise your hand if you've heard of parables. Most of you have heard of parables. Parables are most associated with Christ's teaching in the New Testament, an earthly story that has a spiritual meaning. Parables, however, did not become new and trendy in the New Testament with Christ. In fact, in this book, Hosea 12:10, God says, “I have spoken to the prophets and I've given them visions and I have given them parables as well.” What was this? Hosea's real marriage to a prostitute was a lived-out parable. When Israel looked at Hosea and Gomer, they were supposed to stop and scratch their heads and say, “Like what? What is going on?” Can you imagine watching Hosea and Gomer and their nice little All-American family go down the streets of Jerusalem and then you watch them and you say, “There's Hosea and there's Gomer. Didn't I read about Gomer in the police blotter in the Jerusalem Post?”

She was a prostitute and got arrested for that. “Hosea married her? I thought he wanted a cute little Kansas girl?”

There’s child #1, Jezreel. That’s where Israel, the Northern Kingdom, just got destroyed. Oh, there’s little Lo-ruhamah, no compassion. There’s little toddler, Not My People. What? What is going on here. Nice family? Not quite. Not the kind of family that you envision. What were they to think about when they saw Hosea and his family? Remember this: from the beginning, God’s plan was to have a people who were his very own possession. They were to be his bride and he would be their exclusive groom. He would dwell in their midst in a loving and exclusive relationship of marriage but the people did not keep their vow to have God as their one exclusive husband.

Israel did agree to wedding vows at Mount Sinai, Exodus 20, the Ten Commandments. And the first wedding vow was this: have no other husband before you; have no other God before you, Israel. But Israel was like Gomer, a prostitute, going after every other so-called suitor who would give her immediate feeling of security and pleasure. And after about 800 years of Israel’s unfaithful history, God says, “You are not acting like my bride. You are not acting like my people. You are not the spouse that I am to have compassion on. You go over to your other suitors and see if they will be as good a husband to you as I have been.” That’s what that was all about and that sets the tone for the rest of the Minor Prophets.

A couple of applications that we can draw here right off the bat, these are not in your notes. Just listen with me for just a moment. Israel’s history is written for our instruction. Why do we have this? We share the same fundamental heart problem as Israel. We have a heart that chases after every pleasure in exclusion to the ultimate pleasure of the presence of our great living God. We love the pleasures of this world, the amusement, the food, the drink, more than we love the Creator of those pleasures. We love the praise of our peers, the accolades, the compliments, the achievements, more than we love the praise of God. We love the power to influence and manipulate rather than the God who gives that influence when we humbly serve. We like Israel, are like Gomer, as well. We are spiritual prostitutes and that is a result of the fall. Creation, fall, redemption.

Secondly, as you look at this, as you look at Hosea and his marriage, a lived-out parable, really? God goes to extraordinary lengths to help his people see. God placed in front of Israel a visible picture of what they were doing. And can I say this to you? God has placed around us, if we have eyes to see, if we will hear, God has placed around us visible pictures as well. For example: how many broken marriages do we have to see, husbands, before we start being the servant leader we need to be? How many hurt children do we have to see, parents, before we learn how to control our anger? How many broken relationships do we have to experience before we learn how to control our tongue? How many empty entertainment driven, self-absorbed lifestyles do we render the judgment of unattractive do we have to begin to behold before we live for something else other than the pleasures of this world? How many souls ripped up by sexual pleasures do we have to hear about before we stop dabbling in pornography ourselves? Wisdom is shouting in the streets. Will you have eyes to see these things?

What has God placed around you that is shouting, “Your life is not working without me?” Your life in pursuit of these temporal things is not working. Are there obvious signs around you? Broken relationships? Continued enslavement to sin? Hosea 14:9, wisdom, wisdom, hear: “Whoever is wise, let him understand these things.”

Now, we can’t obviously go through every Minor Prophet like I just did with an excerpt from Hosea so I’m just going to give you like a sentence of most of these. Look at your bulletin, what happens after Hosea? Joel comes along. Joel written anywhere from 800-515 BC, we really can’t pinpoint the date of that one. It speaks about this thing that the Minor Prophets begin to coin, “The Day of the Lord.” I’ll have more to say about that in just a moment, toward the end of the message but “The day of the Lord,” is an important concept.

Amos comes along, talks about God as the author of desolation and restoration. Obadiah then comes along in 586, God will judge the nation that mocks the downfall of his people. You know, as Israel was falling, the Northern Kingdom was falling to Assyria. Nations around Israel were basically laughing at Israel. God will have his day with them, too.

Jonah comes along, 760 BC and this is a fascinating, this is one of the only prophets that is not written in poetry. It is written more in prose narrative. Jonah, many of you have studied that this spring in your ABFs. Here is a one sentence summary of Jonah: Jonah, like Israel, would rather die than see God’s grace extended to the nations. If you read Jonah, that’s really the bottom line.

You know, many of us could be like Jonah in that regard and here’s what Jonah was like: Jonah was all about salvation for himself. Whenever he got comfort, whenever he got his fire insurance from hell, whenever he got rescued, he was delighted but he did not want to extend that rescuing to others. Jonah, I can imagine, could probably cite an Old Testament version of John 3:16 all day long and praise the Lord from his own salvation from hell. But Israel and Jonah totally missed the point of why God saved him. God did not save him simply for his own benefit but God saved him and Israel for the spread of God’s glory throughout the nations and to the world. The same with us, folks. Believers of Faith Church here, God hasn’t saved us and given us this amazing salvation just so that we can sit around and bask in the glory for ourselves and make sure that we have our fire insurance from hell. He gave it to us so that we could glorify God by extending that grace to those around us.

So what are you doing to get about serving the community and glorifying God by extending that grace to those around us? Maybe the first step for you here today, if you’re not even a member of Faith Church, maybe it’s for you to say something like this, “Today I’m going to plant myself here at Faith Church, be a part of this body that is attempting to reach out for the community of Christ.” And that starts with joining the church. Pastor Viars mentioned Intro to Faith coming up. If you’re new and desiring to know more about our church, I would hope that Wednesday night, July 10th, starting at

6:30 to 8:00 p.m., we're over in the Community Center, that you would come and join us and see what this church is all about and what we're trying to do and being a light unlike Jonah was.

The Minor Prophets go on. The next Minor Prophet is Micah. Micah wrote around 720 BC right around the fall of the Northern Kingdom. Micah's name literally means in Hebrew "who is like Yahweh" in contrast to all the idols that Israel was serving. "Who is like the one true God?" the one bringing judgment? Israel was about to be judged. The one who promised restoration and the one who promised his Kingdom as well.

722 BC, the Northern Kingdom did ultimately fall to Nineveh. Israel's kingdom was wiped out by the Assyrians whose capital was Nineveh. The next Minor Prophet is Nahum and it actually concerns Nineveh. "Nineveh, I know, I used you as an instrument of judgment upon my people, but the way that you treated them and also the way that you have functioned unrighteously, I'm going to judge you too." The Divine Warrior will make sure that the nations who have exercised their kingdoms in unrighteousness will ultimately be judged as well. The Divine Warrior who judges the nations as well, not just Israel, as symbolized by Nineveh.

Habakkuk: God's surprising justice and the triumph of those who manifest faith.
Zephaniah: the destructive Day of the Lord and future restoration.

You're getting a theme here: it's all about judgment and something called "The Day of the Lord" coming. Let that concept, and I haven't explained the concept to you very much yet, the concept of "The Day of the Lord," keep that in the back of your mind at this moment in time.

Zephaniah in 640 BC, the destructive Day of the Lord and a promised future restoration. That was one of the last Minor Prophets before the Southern Kingdom was taken by Babylon. 586 BC, the Southern Kingdom is destroyed. 586-532, for 70 years Israel, because of her unfaithfulness, is in captivity in Babylon for 70 years and then God promises a restoration and he brings them out in 532 BC. The repentant remnant of God's people are freed from captivity in 532.

There are three prophetic books left. Let me give you just a word of context about these three prophetic books: the last three prophetic books are after the exile of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, and God had poured out his judgment and his discipline upon his prostituting people and then he restored a repentant remnant. That post-exilic community was expecting the fullness of God's promises and the fullness of his glory to come once again and dwell with them, like in a restored Edenic, the Garden of Eden, paradise where his Kingdom would be fully established. But it wasn't. And it wasn't because of the people's continued sin. The people began to have a question, "Why isn't the fullness of God's glory coming to dwell with us like he promised?" Therefore, you have these three remaining prophets.

Haggai: God will fulfill his promised restoration but the people must be characterized by righteousness. If my Kingdom comes, the people must have righteousness. Zechariah: when my Kingdom comes, it will be led through a Davidic descendant, fulfilling the Davidic, Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants. Malachi: the Kingdom of God will belong to those who persevere and living faithfully to God. Lock onto that for just a second, that's going to become important. Malachi: the Kingdom of God will belong, God's presence and his glory, and dwelling with his people, will belong to those who are truly righteous and guess what? A Day of the Lord will show who is truly righteous. I haven't explained that concept yet but I will.

Big Picture. Take a breath. Brent, take a breath. What do the Minor Prophets teach about men? Here's what the Minor Prophets teach about men: the seed of Adam has failed to realize the Kingdom of God, God's presence with his people, because of their prostitution. Their spiritual adultery.

Turn now if you will to Malachi 3:1, I believe it's page 678. Basically, the last page of the Old Testament. "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple," because he's not there now, his presence is not in your midst, folks. "And the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire... Then I will draw near to you for judgment;" verse 5, I skipped one verse, "and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me," says the LORD of hosts." Look at verse 7, "From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them. Return," repent is the word there, "and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts."

Jump to 4:1, "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." Great ending, huh? We have now seen the beginning of The Twelve, the book of Hosea. We've seen the ending of the book of "The Twelve." What does this teach us? The beginning is like the ending. There is no glorious Kingdom of God on earth where man is dwelling with God in Paradise and man is right with God and man is right with himself and he's right with others, there's no broken relationship and he's right with creation. The Minor Prophets, at least, teach us this: after about 2,000 years of history with God, man could not achieve a dwelling place with God. If today you are still trying to get to God by yourself, what are you hoping to do that mankind hasn't done in 2,000+ years? Why are you still trying to get to God by your own works, by you being good enough because there is none. Mankind cannot find a way back to God because of his sin.

What do the Minor Prophets teach us about God? First, I think if we look at the Big Picture, it teaches us this: God is a Sovereign King over all of the nations in contrast to all of the human kings that do not last. What do we make of all of the history in the

prophetic books that you kind of grow weary of? This kingdom rose and then it fell. Assyria rose and then it fell. Egypt rose and then it fell. Babylon rose and then it fell. And God using this one against this one. What is God doing? He is the Sovereign King throughout all of the gyrations of human kingdoms rising and falling, God the One King has been orchestrating all of this, purposely sifting through the graveyard of humanity demonstrating concretely that there is no righteous king or kingdom and no one to inherit and establish his Kingdom upon this earth. That's what all the failure looks like. That's what it points to. And God has orchestrated all of it so that we might see that there is no lasting kingdom of man.

And as King, he is able to bring about his day. His day, The Day of the Lord. You may say, "Brent, I don't understand that." And there are some parts of this I don't fully understand either but the Minor Prophets are best known for using the term and coining the term "The Day of the Lord." They do that more than the Major Prophets. That term may be somewhat mysterious to us, but let me try to unpack it for just a little bit. Really, simply, the term refers to God's intervention in history in judgment and salvation. God coming and acting in judgment is a Day of the Lord.

God's day also includes a saving component that rewards and reveals those who have withstood his judgment. For example, back in Genesis when God brought the Flood to destroy and wipe out mankind, that was a Day of the Lord. A day of God coming in judgment but then Noah and his family were delivered. The Exodus, when God crushed the Egyptians, that was a Day of the Lord but God brought his people through the Red Sea. Now, in Malachi, the last chapter of the last book of the book of The Twelve and the last book of the Old Testament. He mentions a Day of the Lord coming, "Behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace." Again, where God will send a prophet like Hosea, like Elijah, screaming out, "Something's coming! Something's coming! If you have eyes to see, something is coming. A Day of the Lord of judgment and fury and fire. Who is righteous that will withstand to inherit the Kingdom of God?" God as King will have his day, looking for the one who will inherit his eternal and everlasting Kingdom.

Friends, point of application: how do we even believe that we could stand in the Day of the Lord? When the Lord comes to judge, who can be delivered? In the millennia of history of the Old Testament it shows that no one ultimately can set up an everlasting Kingdom that will last. Faith friends, why doesn't any nation or people last? Because there is no nation or people that is righteous.

We just celebrated July 4th and praise the Lord that God has given us a nation that I have the freedom to do this with you and pray and worship and I'm thankful and I wouldn't want to be in any other nation, but you know, folks, the seeds of America's demise are already planted in our innate unrighteousness in this country. There has to be a kingdom out there that is better than America but where? And founded by who? The Old Testament didn't show one.

That's the end of the Old Testament story. But you say, "That can't be the end. That's not a satisfying story." I agree. "That's just the bad news," Pastor Brent." I agree. It's like

Cinderella being left with the evil stepmother in the end. Yes. It's like Snow White being left in the glass coffin. Why don't you tickle our ears with the good news, Brent?" Because I can't in the Old Testament. Let the Old Testament ending leave us feeling the emptiness of mankind without God. Let's feel the impact of millennia of human history of mankind not being able to reach God on their own. Let's see the devastation of mankind and mankind's kingdoms upon the earth, its oppression, its corruption, its destructions. Nothing can last. And let the Old Testament story prepare the way for the hopelessness of man left to himself. That's what the Old Testament does until something bursts onto the scene. Not something but some one.

How do the Minor Prophets point to Jesus? Let's finish our time with this. Let me ask you a question: if you were kind of tracking with me some of those points that I said to lock onto, what do the Minor Prophets show about who will fully realize the Kingdom of God? If the Minor Prophets teach us that the Kingdom of God can only be realized by a person who is righteous, faithful, loyal, then where does that leave us? No one of the seed of mankind has ever met that condition, therefore, no one will ever dwell with God and realize the Kingdom of God. Except, New Testament, Matthew 1:23, Jesus Christ born of a virgin from the seed of God, not just the seed of man. He was the one who came to fulfill all righteousness. He was the one who came to fulfill all that we have just spoken about. He was the one who Pilate said, "I can find no guilt in him." And in Hebrews, it talks about this is the one who has inherited the Kingdom of God because he was the one that was found righteous.

How was he found righteous? Think with me on this question: how will the righteous be revealed? And I answered that earlier: the righteous will be revealed by a Day of the Lord where the Lord comes in judgment, God's judgment is unleashed and the righteous withstand underneath it and go through it so that they are still standing. What, my friends, was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ? Was it God's terrifying judgment unleashed? Jesus Christ was brutally murdered in the most heinous way. An earthquake happened that day and the sun grew dark; sounds like a pretty dark day to me if you ask me that. It sounds like a Day of the Lord unleashing his judgment toward one person and that was Christ. Jesus Christ experiences the full wrath of God upon the cross. But let me ask you this folks, did Jesus Christ withstand the judgment? Did he come through it? Was he the one that was revealed as righteous? And you say, "Yes, absolutely." Jesus Christ was delivered. God raised him miraculously from the dead as vindication of "he is the one who will inherit my Kingdom and he is the one who was revealed to all as the only one of all mankind, seed of God, seed of man, that is worthy of the Kingdom of God and will establish an everlasting Kingdom of God."

So, that leaves one question for us. Oh my friends, how will you be righteous? If we are like the Old Testament people, how will I be righteous and inherit the Kingdom of God? There was only one person who ever did, the seed of God in Jesus Christ who was vindicated by God on the Day of the Lord, persevering through the wrath of God and God vindicating him as showing him as the only righteous one. The only way that you will be standing with God in his Kingdom is if you are connected to Christ. If you are in Christ. Only if you have latched on, connected to Jesus Christ and you're shielded from

the wrath of God which Jesus Christ took for you and he was vindicated as the only righteous one.

Unbeliever today, if you're here listening to this, my friend, there is no excuse for you not to turn to Jesus Christ today. What has 2,000+ years of human history showed you? That you're going to do something different? Really? You can't get to God on your own. Jesus Christ was the only one who inherited that because of his righteousness.

Believer, there is no excuse for us not to stand boldly now in Christ because he took the Day of the Lord for us and now to fulfill our purpose as lights to the world boldly because in Christ we stand. So, be encouraged. That is the good news, my friend. When the Old Testament ends on the bad news, Jesus Christ comes in ushering in the good news. Will you seek him and stand in him today?