

## Unit 1: Major Themes from Minor Prophets

### Lesson 2 | March 9, 2025 The Pain of Broken Covenants

#### Study Text

Hosea 1:1–11; 3:1–5; 6:1–11; Jonah 3:1–10; Micah 6:1–16; Nahum 3:1–19

#### Central Truth

God is faithful and expects faithfulness from His people.

#### Key Verse: Micah 6:8

He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (KJV)

The LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God (NLT).

#### Learning Objectives

- Students will recognize the truth about God's grace and judgment.
- Students will experience God's mercies.
- Students will share the gospel with others so they may escape the coming judgment.

#### Introducing the Lesson

**Say:** Many people have strange ideas about what God is like. Sometimes they focus on one element of His nature and think it encompasses everything about Him. But God is more complicated than that. The Minor Prophets show us the complexity of God; at the same time, He is both abundantly merciful and terrifyingly just.

#### Discussion Starter—Job Title

*Give people a minute to think about an unusual way to describe what they do for a living or how they spend most of their time during the week. (Examples: creatively burning money in the spirit of patriotism—fireworks salesperson; teaching kids enough to complain but not enough to make a difference—college professor; taking pictures of clumsy people—X-ray technician)*

**Say:** The Minor Prophets tell us a lot about who God is and what He does. Some of the descriptions are shocking and complex, but they are all necessary for us to have an accurate understanding of who He is.

During the final years of the northern kingdom of Israel and the century that followed, God spoke through a unique group of prophets. They delivered God's message in a variety of ways, including bold declarations, living examples, and even gloomy songs. Although these prophets operated in different times, used different methods of communication, and experienced different outcomes, each one shared jarring truths about God's lavish grace and His terrible wrath.

## **Part 1—God Requires Faithfulness**

### **A Troubled Marriage**

Hosea 1:1–11; 3:1–5

**Say:** The first three chapters of Hosea use the familiar example of marriage to represent God's relationship to His people. Hosea's marriage was far from happy. He experienced the pain of betrayal firsthand, living out a vivid metaphor that showed how God's people had heartlessly betrayed Him.

Hosea is the first book in the collection known as the Minor Prophets, or the Book of Twelve. Hosea was the last recorded prophet to speak to the northern kingdom of Israel before they were overtaken by the Assyrians. A resident of Israel, Hosea was given one of the most difficult assignments in Scripture. His prophecies would not be simply spoken or written; they would be lived out in his own family.

The Book of Hosea begins with the pain of a broken marriage vow. Few emotional wounds are as devastating as those caused by adultery. This sin causes solemn, even joyful, promises to become the source of incredible pain. What a fitting metaphor for the betrayal God experienced when His people worshipped false gods (Hosea 1:2).

Many people have tried hard to understand and even justify God's instructions to Hosea, which seem contrary to what we would expect. At the beginning of Hosea's prophetic ministry, the Lord instructed him to get married (verse 2). The next part of the instruction complicates things. God tells the prophet to take a prostitute as his wife. There is no softening the ugliness of the word in the biblical text. God would not only use this marriage to communicate His messages, but each child born to Hosea and his wife would illustrate the unfolding expression of God's work in Israel (1:3 through 2:1).

Like a wife who violated her marriage vows to pursue other men, the people of Israel had abandoned God to pursue other gods. Like Hosea, God was covenant-bound to an unfaithful spouse. Two realities would result from this betrayal:

1. Just as Hosea's wife would experience the consequences of her unfaithfulness, so Israel would experience devastating judgment (2:1–13).
2. God instructed Hosea to go again to his wife and love her although she had abandoned him (3:1–5). Why was Hosea supposed to extend this mercy? Because that is exactly what God does with His rebellious people. Even after God had rescued them and united them to himself in covenant, they continually rejected Him and ran back to their sin. Miraculously, God was willing to pay the price to redeem His people and renew His covenant with them.

### **Resource Packet Item 1: Marriage Metaphors**

Students will reflect on positive and negative marriage illustrations in Scripture and prayerfully consider the quality of their own faithfulness to God.

### Discuss

? What makes marriage such an effective biblical analogy?

? Why would God put Hosea through so much agony just so He could send a message to Israel? What does this teach us about God?

### **Talk Is Cheap**

Hosea 6:1–11

**Say:** God made it clear that devastating judgment was coming soon to Israel. They responded with empty, religious-sounding words, but their hearts didn't change. God wanted more from them—a genuine covenant relationship based on love and faithfulness.

Hosea's real-life marriage metaphor was not the only prophecy he delivered. Like most other prophets, he spoke in poetic verses. Sometimes, he joined with his own nation in a prayerful response (6:1–3); other times, he delivered God's words to the nation. These messages, also known as "oracles," can contain good news of mercy, blessing, and restoration or bad news of indictment and judgment. In Hosea 6, the prophet held two roles, speaking words of repentance on his nation's behalf (verses 1–3) and speaking words of judgment on God's behalf (verses 4–11).

The people of Israel had already heard from Hosea that God was going to judge them. They were guilty of many sins, especially that they did not really know the Lord (5:4). As a result, they were going to experience punishment, desolation, and wrath.

Israel said they would return to the Lord (6:1), using the normal Hebrew word for repentance, which simply means "to turn." Their words may have sounded right, but the Lord diagnosed a deeper issue. Israel had correctly said that God was as dependable as the dawn and the spring rains (verse 3), but God responded by saying that Israel's repentant words were as temporary as fog or dew that quickly burns away (verse 4). God wanted more than empty rituals (verses 5–6).

When people realize they need to repent, they often say the right words. But God wants more. He desires true repentance—a genuine change of heart. Outward actions and empty words don't fool Him, because He can see through them to the reality of our hearts. Really knowing God—which is the highest goal expressed by God in the Book of Hosea—means loving Him genuinely and living for Him consistently.

### Discuss

? What does it mean that knowing God is better than burnt offerings? How can a person be sure they know God in the way He expects?

? The people of Israel said repentant words, but God did not accept that they were truly repentant. From this passage, what does true repentance look like?

## **Part 2—God's Case against His People**

## **The Indictment**

Micah 6:1–5

**Say:** The prophet Micah, who was from the southern kingdom of Judah, was prophesying in Israel at around the same time as Hosea. Micah 6 records God's devastating indictment of Israel's guilt.

It is an important principle in our legal system that people who are accused of crimes have the right to know the charges against them. This usually involves a courtroom encounter where charges are presented in the form of an indictment—a list of crimes the individual is suspected of committing. Many Old Testament prophetic books include indictments of nations, kings, or religious leaders. Sometimes the prophet issues the indictment in their own voice, but in Micah 6:1–5, God himself lists the charges against His people.

This indictment is a double-edged sword. Rather than simply saying, “You did this evil thing,” God indicts the people by defending himself. Each charge compares the people's sin with God's faithfulness. God opens with a piercing question: “O my people, what have I done to you?” (verse 3). The people were treating God as though He had been cruel or unfeeling, but God's faithfulness and deliverance showed that the opposite was true.

Israel's history—including the Exodus, the wilderness wanderings, and the conquest of the Promised Land—was used as examples, establishing the evidence that God was continually at work on His people's behalf (verses 4–5). He saved them from slavery in Egypt. He gave them godly leaders to guide and care for them. He protected them from their enemies. He reaffirmed His covenant with them again and again. Unlike the people, God had always been faithful.

We must also stop and carefully compare our actions and attitudes to God's. If our hearts are faithful and obedient, we can joyfully reflect on God's character and praise Him for His goodness. But if our hearts are faithless and disobedient, this time of reflection will be for us what it was for the people of Israel: a painful indictment.

### Discuss

? Many people can only conceive of God as a harsh judge, while others only see Him as an indulgent grandfather. How does Micah 6:1–5 add to your view of God?

? When have you experienced God's goodness in an especially memorable way? How can you intentionally remind yourself of those milestones?

## **The Remedy**

Micah 6:6–8

**Say:** After God's indictment of Israel, Micah asked the logical next question: How could the people avert God's anger? Micah's answer still offers guidance to believers today.

In Micah 6:6–8, the prophet responds to God’s indictment with a series of probing questions that illustrate how a sincere, repentant person responds to His correction. For many in Israel at that time, the immediate response would have been to offer sacrifices at the temple. Yet God wanted something more than outward rituals. When people merely followed a ritual without having repentant hearts, their sacrifices were completely ineffective.

In verse 8, Micah explained that God wanted three things from His people. Much more than God wants sacrifice, He wants His people to:

1. **“Do what is right.”** The word for “justice” in this verse is most often connected with leadership. God wants everyone—but especially those in positions of influence—to act in righteous ways. He wants vulnerable people to be cared for as much as powerful people. By showing justice, we reflect God’s character.
2. **“Love mercy.”** The Hebrew word for “mercy” here is *hesed*, which describes God’s steadfast love. It conveys the idea of loving and faithful action that comes from a genuine commitment to the covenant.
3. **“Walk humbly with your God.”** The word for “walk humbly” only appears here in the entire Old Testament. God is searching for people who will stay close to Him, living in the authentic humility that results from being near Him.

### **Resource Packet Item 2: Memory Verse—Micah 6:8**

Encourage students to memorize this verse to keep their focus on truly pleasing God.

#### Discuss

- ? What empty religious practices do people think will earn God’s mercy?
- ? How could your study group “do justly” (Micah 6:8, KJV) in your community?

## **Part 3—Judgment Is Temporarily Delayed**

### **Judgment Postponed**

Jonah 3:4–10

**Say:** The repentance of Nineveh was a shocking moment in salvation history. In this story, God sent Jonah to one of the most powerful, violent, and wicked nations on earth. His mission was to pronounce judgment and destruction, but Nineveh’s response brought compassion instead.

Assyria was one of the most powerful and terrifying empires to ever exist. For over two hundred years, they had directly harassed and ultimately destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel. Jonah’s mission to Assyria’s capital likely took place sometime between 800–750 BC. Although the prophet did not want to go to Nineveh—because he feared the people would repent and be spared—he eventually ended up there.

The abruptness of the encounter between Jonah and the Ninevites is stunning. Jonah 3 summarizes it in two verses. In verse 4, Jonah preached that judgment was coming in forty days. In verse 5, the whole city repented—from the least to the greatest. Verses 6–9 go on to describe how the king himself led Assyria in repentance.

The king's repentance was deep and transformative. In the Ancient Near East, inward realities were often expressed with symbolic outward actions. This is why the king wanted everyone to put on sackcloth garments and cover themselves with ashes. This represented their deep sorrow and humility in a very public way. In a decision that seems almost funny to modern readers, he commanded that even the animals should wear garments of repentance. Every Ninevite was to call out to God for mercy and turn from the evil and violence that characterized their empire.

God's response to this genuine repentance was extraordinary. When He saw the Ninevites' change of heart, specifically that they changed their behavior, He did exactly what Jonah had feared. God was moved with compassion. Judgment was postponed.

Jonah's successful mission to a heathen people stands as a startling contrast to God's covenant people. The Assyrians humbled themselves and repented at Jonah's message. The Israelites consistently refused to respond to the messages of the prophets God raised up among them. Ironically, the unrepentant Israelites would "be forced to serve Assyria" (Hosea 11:5), whom God would use as a tool of judgment (Isaiah 10:5–7). During His ministry, Jesus would use the repentance of the Ninevites to chastise those who refused to believe in Him and His message (Matthew 24:41).

Still today, even the worst sinners receive God's miraculous grace and compassion when they genuinely repent. "If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness" (1 John 1:8–9).

### **Resource Packet Item 3: Beyond Grace?**

Students will search their hearts for any Jonah-like bitterness and then ask God to replace it with His compassion. This handout would work best as a take-home page for personal devotions.

#### Discuss

? Do you know anyone who thinks their sins are unforgivable? How can the story of the Ninevites help them understand God's love and grace?

### **Judgment Realized**

Nahum 3:1–7

**Say:** Sadly, the Ninevites' repentance did not last. Just over one hundred years later, Assyria went back to its wicked and violent ways.



After the miraculous repentance in Nineveh during Jonah's day, the Assyrians experienced a century-long reprieve from judgment. Multiple generations lived and prospered in Nineveh because one generation heard from God and turned from evil. In a pattern often repeated throughout Scripture, three or four generations later, the people had forgotten God's kindness and turned back to their sin.

The prophet Nahum was delivering a message to Judah, but the topic was the judgment coming to Nineveh. This time, the Assyrians would not get a special envoy from God to warn them and lead them to repentance. Instead, God was preparing a new empire to bring an end to the power of the Assyrians. Though God had used the Assyrians to bring judgment on His unfaithful people, He would turn against Assyria because of their pride and arrogance (Isaiah 10:12). Nineveh was going to fall.

All three chapters of Nahum focus on the judgment coming to Nineveh. In chapter 3, the prophet describes the nature of the judgment in a song—specifically, a funeral dirge. He begins with the pronouncement of “woe.” Almost every use of this word in the Bible introduces a declaration of judgment. Nahum describes Nineveh as “the bloody city” (verse 1, KJV). The city that had shed the blood of so many enemies was about to be bloodied itself.

In a series of rapid declarations, Nahum explained how the destruction would come. Galloping horses, speeding chariots, flashing swords, and glittering spears would finally ruin the city. One famous king of Assyria had gloated about burning both dead and living bodies at the gates of a city he had conquered; now, this kind of horror would be seen inside the gates of Nineveh. Terrifyingly, God declared of Nineveh, “I am your enemy!” (verse 5). Nineveh had no hope of victory.

This story of judgment is a somber warning. The faith and repentance of previous generations cannot protect us from the results of our own sin. We must repent and follow the Lord ourselves.

### Discuss

? Vivid depictions of violent judgment in the Bible are difficult for modern audiences to read. What do we need to learn about the terrible nature of sin from passages like these?

? Why do you think history records the pattern of people falling back into sin three to four generations after spiritual renewal? How can we avoid this pattern?

### **What Is God Saying to Us?**

**Say:** The prophets teach important lessons about God's faithfulness and the faithfulness He expects from His people. Sin separates people from God, and ultimately, it brings judgment. On the other hand, the good news is too glorious to keep to ourselves. As great as His judgments are, His mercies are greater! Like the people in Scripture, we need to search our hearts and listen carefully to God. When He calls us to repent, we should immediately obey.

## **Living It Out**

### **Ministry in Action**

- Search your heart today. Listen for God's voice and repent if He speaks to you about anything in your life that displeases Him.
- Pray that God would reach specific people you know who are not living for Him.
- Look for an opportunity this week to tell somebody about God's love and truth in a way they can understand.

### **Daily Bible Readings**

#### **Monday:**

Promise Kept to Faithful Caleb.

Joshua 14:6–15

#### **Tuesday:**

The Promised Land Given.

Joshua 21:43–45

#### **Wednesday:**

The Promised Land Lost.

Deuteronomy 28:15, 36–42

#### **Thursday:**

Great and Precious Promises.

2 Peter 1:1–4

#### **Friday:**

Deceptive and Deadly Promises.

2 Peter 2:17–21

#### **Saturday:**

The Promise of Christ's Return.

2 Peter 3:1–9