

Unit 1: Major Themes from Minor Prophets

Lesson 7 | April 13, 2025

God Promises Blessings

Study Text

Hosea 14:1–9; Zephaniah 3:9–20; Haggai 1:13 through 2:9

Central Truth

Astonishing blessings await God's people.

Key Verse: Haggai 2:9

The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts (KJV).

"The future glory of this Temple will be greater than its past glory, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. And in this place I will bring peace. I, the LORD of Heaven's Armies, have spoken!" (NLT)

Learning Objectives

- Students will recognize and celebrate the blessings in store for God's people.
- Students will commit to listen to God's words and obey without hesitation.
- Students will let go of anxiety and rest in God's love and provision.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: As we finish this series on the Minor Prophets, we're going to focus on the blessings God promised to His people. But first, let's think about the blessings He's given us. Raise your hand if you've heard the hymn "Count Your Many Blessings." How about the song "Count Your Blessings Instead of Sheep" from the movie *White Christmas*?

Discussion Starter—Count Your Blessings

Say: How many blessings can you count in 30 seconds? *(Have students record their lists on scrap paper or a notetaking app on their phone. When they're ready, start a 30-second timer. Find out who made the longest list and ask them to read it if they're comfortable doing so.)*

Say: If you had unlimited time to count your blessings, there's no telling how long your list would be. We are such blessed people! But today's lesson from Hosea, Zephaniah, and Haggai will remind us of the eternal blessings God has in store for His people. Why not start a new list and keep track of all the blessings we talk about today?

Hosea, Zephaniah, and Haggai ministered during very different periods in Israel's history. But each one shared amazing promises from God about the blessings that were in store for His people if they would only remain faithful to Him. Wise readers of Scripture must consider prophetic blessings in their proper context, careful not to

appropriate promises that were made to a certain group of people in a certain time and place. But the blessings we will discuss today appear in long-distance promises that apply not just to God's people in the Old Testament, but to all of us who will spend eternity with Him. These blessings are for *all* of God's children.

Part 1—Healing and Rest

The People's Prayer

Hosea 14:1–3

Say: As the northern kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria and Hosea's ministry drew to a close, the prophet issued a final call for the people to repent. If they would return to God someday, He would bless them with healing, love, and restoration.

Hosea 14 does not include the exact date it was written, but verse 1 implies that the northern kingdom of Israel had already been overthrown by the Assyrian invaders (722 BC). The prophet's final words to the people offer a shred of hope: Although their current judgment was already underway, God would restore their descendants someday if—and only if—they would return to Him. In verses 2–3, Hosea offered a suggested framework for how they should approach the Lord.

- Rather than bringing sacrifices, Hosea tells the people to bring their words of confession to God (verse 2). He urged them yet again to “return to the LORD”—a common refrain in Hosea and throughout the Minor Prophets (3:4–5; 6:1; 7:10; Joel 2:13; Amos 4:6, 8–11; Haggai 2:17; Zechariah 1:3; Malachi 3:7).
- The people were to humbly yet confidently ask for forgiveness (Hosea 14:2), based on God's covenant promise in Exodus 34:7—“I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin.”
- The people were to recommit to worshipping God alone. This meant they must acknowledge that no nation, no weapon, and no idol could ever save them (Hosea 14:3). At times, Israel had turned to Assyria for help (5:13; 8:9). They had accumulated warhorses, probably from Egypt, despite God's command not to do so (Deuteronomy 17:16). And worst of all, they had continued worshipping idols despite the prophet's warnings (Hosea 13:2). Only by severing all these loyalties and devoting themselves to God alone could they experience His restoration in the future.

God's expected response to their repentance is found in the phrase, “in you alone do the orphans find mercy” (14:3). God had described himself as the orphans' protector in Exodus 22:22–24, so if Israel would repent and remain faithful to Him, they could find rest in the shelter of His steadfast love.

Resource Packet Item 1: Framework for Repentance

While Hosea's suggested procedure for repentance is certainly not the only way to return to the Lord, it might be a helpful starting point for some. This worksheet guides

students to follow Hosea's framework and write their own prayers of repentance. This handout would work best as a take-home page for personal reflection and prayer.

Discuss

? How do you think Hosea's framework might still be useful for us today?

? What are some things you might be depending on instead of God? How can you sever those loyalties and devote yourself to God alone?

The Lord's Answer

Hosea 14:4–9

Say: Not only did Hosea advise the people how they should pray, but he told them what response they could expect from God.

In Hosea 14:4–8, God answers and the text shifts from prose to poetic form. If the people would only confess, God would heal them of the sin they historically struggled with the most: faithlessness (Hosea 14:4, NLT; “backsliding,” KJV; “apostasy,” NASB). And He would not hold their sin against them. Instead, He says, “my love will know no bounds, for my anger will be gone forever.” The Hebrew words used for “love” and “anger” in this verse would have been familiar to the hearers as technical covenant terms, reminding them of God's long-standing promise to their ancestors. God was again stooping low to reach out to His people, imploring them to return to Him and receive His generous mercy.

In verses 5–7, God describes the way He will protect and provide for Israel, allowing them to rest in His shelter. Note the significance of these details:

- This poem recalls Moses' blessing upon the tribes of Joseph (including Ephraim, another name used for Israel) in Deuteronomy 33:13–17.
- Its references to Lebanon use language from Song of Solomon (4:11, 15; 5:15).
- It mentions grain, wine (Hosea 14:7), and oil (“olive trees,” verse 6)—which, as we learned in the last lesson, symbolize God's provision of life's necessities.

Verse 8 begins with a rhetorical question in the original text: “Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols?” In other words, God would not restore the people until they repented. Only in Him could they find help, love, and provision.

The Book of Hosea ends with an appeal to listen to and live by God's words (verse 9). It is a call to growth and wisdom—to discipleship. If Israel would walk in the paths of righteousness, they would find life. If not, they would “stumble and fall.” Jesus concluded His Sermon on the Mount with a similar appeal: “Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock . . . But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand” (Matthew 7:24, 26).

We know from history that, although there was always a faithful remnant in Israel, most of the people continued rejecting Him—and eventually, His Son. May we listen humbly to God’s call to repent and fully devote ourselves to Him. Then we will experience the blessings of God’s presence—both in this life and in the life to come.

Resource Packet Item 2: Listen and Obey

Students will read James 1:19–27 and explore the overlapping biblical concepts of listening and obeying.

Discuss

? Do you think it is significant that the prophet’s words in Hosea 14:1–4 are in prose form, while God’s words in verses 5–8 are in poetic form? If so, why?

? In what areas do you need healing and rest from the Lord?

Part 2—Peace and Restoration

Change Is Coming

Zephaniah 3:9–13

Say: As you may recall, Zephaniah was prophesying at the same time as Jeremiah, delivering God’s messages during King Josiah’s religious reforms (2 Chronicles 34:3–5, 8–18). Even though Judah’s judgment had already been guaranteed because of their sin, Zephaniah encouraged the king and the people to follow through on their recommitment to God.

After describing the judgment that would come upon the wicked (Zephaniah 3:1–8; see Lesson 4, Part 2), Zephaniah shared God’s message of hope. One day, violence would give way to peace and repentance would lead to restoration. The language of all peoples will be purified—a reversal of the Babel confusion in Genesis 11—allowing all nations to gather and worship God together. This is a reminder of the multiple-fulfillment nature of Old Testament prophecy. Not only did God’s words in Zephaniah 3:9 apply to the prophet’s original context, but they also foretold the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. On that day, Jews and Gentiles did indeed worship together in one language—and will continue to do so throughout eternity.

Verse 11 begins the first of three salvation oracles in the remainder of Zephaniah 3. The proud and their corrupting influence would be removed from God’s people, allowing the humble remnant to rest in God’s presence (verse 12). The idea of a faithful remnant (verse 13) is a powerful theme throughout Scripture (2 Kings 19:30–31; 2 Chronicles 34:21; Ezra 9:8; Isaiah 4:2–3; Amos 5:15). Paul explained to the Romans that this remnant of Israel still existed in their day: “A few of the people of Israel have remained faithful because of God’s grace—his undeserved kindness in choosing them. And since it is through God’s kindness, then it is not by their good works” (Romans 11:5–6).

Through the faithful remnant of Israel and the believing Gentiles who joined them in following Jesus, the gospel spread, and the Church grew. We are experiencing

Zephaniah's promised blessing of peace and restoration today. We will experience it fully when Jesus returns.

Discuss

? Why do you think the Minor Prophets—under the Holy Spirit's inspiration—so often follow a description of judgment with a description of blessing?

? How does it affect your view of Pentecost to know that the Spirit's outpouring was prophesied multiple times in the Old Testament (Isaiah 44:1–3; Joel 2:28–29; Zephaniah 3:9)?

Rejoice in God's Blessing

Zephaniah 3:14–20

Say: The Book of Zephaniah ends as Hosea did: with a powerful psalm of future blessing.

Between the first and second salvation oracles in Zephaniah 3 comes a joyous invitation to celebrate (verses 14–15). The invitation includes not only Jerusalem (the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah; also known as Zion) but the northern kingdom of Israel as well. The vision of restoration included a reunification of the entire kingdom. Verse 15 lists the reasons why the people would rejoice on that promised day: Judgment would be over. Enemy armies would be defeated. The Lord would live among them. Their troubles would be ended.

The second salvation oracle begins in verse 16 with the phrase “on that day,” signifying the Day of the Lord. In one of Scripture's most beautiful promises, Zephaniah tells the people that God would one day live among them: “He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs” (verse 17). As one commentator said, “The joy of a restored people mingled with the joy of a restoring God justifies the comparison elsewhere of a marriage jubilation.”¹

The third salvation oracle in Zephaniah 3 contains a list of God's “I will” statements (verses 18–20). These empowering promises of protection, dignity, and belonging would have given the people the hope they so desperately needed during their imminent exile. Yes, they were suffering the consequences of their sins, but God would welcome them home in the end. We can hold on to this hope as well. Whatever we face in this life, we know immeasurable blessings await the children of God (2 Corinthians 4:16–18).

Discuss

? What does it mean to you that God “will rejoice over [us] with joyful songs”?

? Which of God's promises help you make it through tough times?

Part 3—A More Glorious Temple

Live in Fellowship with God

Haggai 1:12–15

Say: After covering themes throughout the other eleven Minor Prophets, we finally come to Haggai (*HAG-igh*). We know nothing about his family or hometown—only that he prophesied at the end of the Babylonian exile, just as the Persians conquered Babylon and allowed the Israelites to return to Jerusalem.

Haggai's primary message was to call God's people to covenant faithfulness. The first step was rebuilding the temple, which had been destroyed when the Babylonians invaded. Two men were leading God's people at this time (Haggai 1:12): Zerubbabel (*Zuh-RUHB-uh-buhl*), who led the exiles home and was appointed governor (Ezra 2:2; 3:8), and Joshua, who was likely a descendant of Aaron and served as the people's spiritual leader (3:2). The people had stopped rebuilding the temple, but after Haggai delivered God's message that it was time to start again, the people enthusiastically followed Zerubbabel and Joshua in obeying the Lord (Haggai 1:14). In return, they received a brief—yet powerful—message from God: "I am with you, says the LORD!" (verse 13).

Verse 15 specifies that only twenty-four days passed between Haggai's message and the rebuilding project being restarted. The people were clearly eager to obey God. Not only was God with them, but He "sparked the enthusiasm" of the people and their leaders alike (verse 14), motivating them to work hard on the project He had given them.

Discuss

? Have you ever had to try working up excitement to obey God? What difference would it make if God himself would spark your enthusiasm?

? The returning exiles delayed rebuilding the temple, building their own homes instead. In what areas might you be delaying instead of obeying God?

Future Glory

Haggai 2:1–9

Say: Just because we're working for God doesn't mean we never get discouraged. The returning exiles learned this firsthand. After working on the new temple for about a month, they realized their version would never compare with the original.

Judging by God's words in Haggai 2:2–9, the people working on the temple rebuilding project must have been disheartened—especially the older workers who had seen the grandeur of Solomon's temple with their own eyes (Ezra 3:12). But God understood their concerns and encouraged them (Haggai 2:3–4). Instead of condemning them for not having enough faith, He told them to be strong and to "get to work, for I am with you" (verse 4). He had been with His people from the beginning. He reminded them of the Egyptian exodus as evidence (verse 5). The Spirit had been with their ancestors, and He was with them too.

Then God explained how His plans for the temple stretched beyond their lifetimes. In fact, the glory of that temple would affect the whole world (verses 6–7). The “treasures of the nations” could refer to the wealth of the Gentiles being given to God’s people, or it might refer to people from every nation who would one day follow Jesus and be welcomed into God’s family. Regardless of the specifics, God’s promise of future glory must have encouraged the people. He would supply everything they needed (verse 8) and He would fill the new temple with a greater measure of glory than the former one (verse 9). It would be the epicenter of His peace.

The people may have recognized this as messianic speech, which probably would have increased their zeal for the rebuilding work. As one commentator points out, “Isaiah had already associated God’s glory with the coming of the Messiah (Isaiah 40:5; 60:1–22). Centuries later, Simeon, moved by the Spirit (Luke 2:25–32), as well as the disciples (John 1:14) recognized God’s glory in Jesus Christ, who embodied God’s presence and glory in human form.”²

Discuss

? In what area of your life might God be saying, “Get to work, for I am with you”?

? How can comparison keep us from zealously obeying God?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: It can be tempting to skim over the Minor Prophets. They talk so much about judgment and destruction, and they aren’t really relevant for us anyway, right? Over the last few weeks, we’ve seen just how important these books are as we serve God today.

- God still calls people to speak for Him.
- He still expects faithfulness from His people.
- He still calls us to reject false religion in any form.
- He still hates injustice and expects us to stand for righteousness.
- He still intends to make all things right in the end.
- He still loves His children, continually calling us to return to Him.
- He still has blessings in store for those who are faithful to the end.

In his second letter, the apostle Peter explained that we should pay close attention to the prophets’ words. “Their words are like a lamp shining in a dark place . . . No prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet’s own understanding, or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:19–21). God has spoken. It’s up to us whether we will listen.

Resource Packet Item 3: Reflecting on the Minor Prophets

Students will reflect on what they have learned about the Minor Prophets over the past several weeks and journal their thoughts and prayerful reflections.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Choose one of the Minor Prophets and read the entire book in one sitting this week. Look for the themes we've studied during this series. What is God speaking to you?
- Look for an opportunity to tell someone (a friend, family member, coworker, or someone at church) about a lesson you've learned from the Minor Prophets.
- Commit to read the parts of the Bible you might be tempted to skip. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand and apply what you're reading.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Blessings for the Obedient.

Deuteronomy 11:8–15

Tuesday:

Blessings for the Reverent.

Psalms 128:1–6

Wednesday:

Prayer for Restoration.

Lamentations 5:1–3, 15–22

Thursday:

Unexpected Blessings

Pronounced. Matthew 5:1–12

Friday:

Resurrected Bodies.

2 Corinthians 5:1–10

Saturday:

The Lamb's Marriage Supper.

Revelation 19:1–10

1. *The Complete Biblical Library: The Old Testament Study Bible*, ed. Ralph W. Harris, Stanley M. Horton, Gayle Garrity Seaver (Tulsa, OK: Empowered Life, 1994–2000), Accordance.
2. *The Complete Biblical Library: The Old Testament Study Bible*.