



Minor Prophets – Major Challenges

Cell Notes 2019

These 5 studies go alongside the summer preaching series but will also stand-alone (or in pairs). Although the books they cover are often considered obscure by modern readers, the issues they address are very topical despite the time gap! They are:

Studies 1 & 2 - Joel: Repentance & Promise

Study 3 - Obadiah: God & the Nations

Studies 4 & 5 - Micah: Warning & Hope



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Study 1. Joel (Part 1) A call to Repent

Aim: To understand the key themes of Joel's writings and to consider what repentance looked like then and now.

Resources: The ability to play YouTube clips, paper and pens.

To start with: If you were to characterise the current state of your relationship with God as an animal, what animal would it be? (E.g. If you're a little sluggish at the moment you might chose a slug or a sloth)

In the next 2 studies we will be considering an animal – or rather insect – that's pretty significant in Israel's relationship with God.

Engaging the text:

Part 1. God's Judgement

Watch the Bible project introduction to Joel (6 mins) <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/joel/>

1. Some parts of Joel are quite well known but what in here was new information for you?

Read **Joel 1.1-12**

2. What do you imagine a locust swarm to be like?

To give you an idea of what swarming locusts look like, take a look at Planet Earth (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYPGOoijy8g>).

Or for a modern day example, take a look at this news report on Madagascar's locust plague in 2013 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MT0gUjMcOWk>)

3. To what extent do you think we should view disasters (either large scale or personal) as judgement from God today? (Take a look at how Jesus responds to news of a disaster in Luke 13.1-5)

Part 2. A Call to respond

Although he doesn't explain the specifics of Israel's sin, Joel makes it clear that in this case it is what has led to God's Judgement. However, even then the situation is not without hope.

Read **Joel 1.13-14**

1. What instructions are given and who to?

Read **Joel 2.12-17**

2. According to Joel, what does GENUINE repentance look like and what is it motivated by?
3. As a rule, how do you view repentance from sins? How far does it match with what Joel is expressing here?



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4. In order to consider our own attitude towards repentance, give people paper and a pen. Ask them to write the word REPENT in the middle of the paper and then spend some time (at least 5 mins in quiet) praying/contemplating/ doodling/ writing
 - Whether there is something the Lord is calling them to repent of – either in their life as an individual or their part in corporate sins against God.
 - What that repentance might look like for them?

Response:

(and this will be difficult): Encourage people to be as brave and honest as they can to talk and pray in pairs/small groups about what the Holy Spirit has been saying to them. (N.B. Please do give people the option not to share right now if it's very personal – but encourage them to talk to someone they trust in the near future).

Finish by reading aloud together the call and promise of Joel 2.13. 'Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.'



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Study 2. Joel (Part 2) Promises of Hope

Aim: To reflect on how God's promise of his Spirit with us means that we can face the future with hope rather than fear.

Resources: A copy of the questions for each of the three small groups & 3 colours of ribbon/thread/wool so people can have a length of each for the final prayer activity.

To start with: Orange Phones once famously used the advertising slogan, "The Future's bright; the future's orange". What would your one sentence view of the future be?

Engaging with the text:

Read Aloud: *The Book of Joel shows how sin can wreak havoc on our world, but that God's mercy creates hope for the future. The first half focusses on past events calling people to repentance the second half looks forward to God's promises of restoration.*

Divide the group into 3 for 10-15 minutes. One group will look at each of the 3 promises God gives through Joel and feedback what it was. You might want to let people choose depending on what they are interested in but try to keep the groups roughly even. (N.B. give them a copy of the questions, so they don't have to keep asking you what they are!)

Group A. The Promise to Empower:

Read **Joel 2. 28-32**

1. A. What do you find comforting and/or unsettling about this promise?
B. Compare it with Isaiah 44.3 & Ezekiel 36.26-27
2. Famously Peter quoted this prophecy as fulfilled on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 (17-21)
A. Why did God send his Spirit at that particular time?
B. How do you feel about the Holy Spirit and the promise that God will empower you to serve Him in building his kingdom?
C. Where are you aware of the Spirit at work in and through you? (If you are not, why do you think that might be?)

Group B. The Promise to Protect and Bring Justice

Read **Joel 3.1-16** and pick out

1. A. Who is being oppressed, how and by whom?
B. How is God going to bring about justice on the exploiters?
2. Jesus famously preached about the struggling and their oppressors. Read Luke 6.20-26
How does this compare with Joel's vision of judgement?
3. In our world, what sorts of people do you think these words ought to encourage and disturb? How do you think we should be responding to them?

Group C. The promise to Envision for the Future

Read **Joel 3.17-21**

1. A. What is God's promise to his people about their long-term future? (what does it include?)
B. Why do you think they would find this comforting?



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2. What do verses 17 & 21 (that start and close this promise) have in common and why do you think it's significant? (N.B. *if you get stuck, God dwelling with his people is a promise of both blessing and security, that he will never leave them.*)
3. This promise is echoed in a number of places in Scripture – famously in Revelation 22.1-5.
 - A. What are the parallels?
 - B. What in these promises gives you most comfort personally and why?

All together: Have each group share briefly (2 mins max) the key points they discussed and how the promise they read about offers us hope. Then discuss.

4. How could this practically shape our thinking, speaking and acting in a world that feels dark and hopeless and among people who so often feel powerless?

Response:

As a prayer activity give people 3 coloured ribbons/ threads: One for Spirit, One for Justice, One for Hope of Shalom. Spend some time praying and plaiting those together as a bookmark/reminder of the three promises in Joel.



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Study 3. Obadiah - God and the Nations

Aim: To understand the background and context of the shortest of the prophetic writings – Obadiah – and to consider how its themes apply to our world and lives

To start with:

- How do you feel when a person, organisation or even nation you dislike meets with misfortune or defeat?
- (What would you say that reveals about us as people?)

Engaging the Text:

1. The book of Obadiah concerns the nation of Edom. What (if anything) do you know about Edom and its relationship with the nation of Israel?

Read **Obadiah 1-14**

2. What do these verses suggest about (a) the nation of Edom, and (b) God's view of them?

Read Aloud: *Edom occupied the mountainous region south of Judah. The capital Sela (now Petra) was perched high on a plateau above a sheer rock cliff approached by a narrow gorge. It was virtually impregnable. From mountain strongholds like this the Edomites launched their raids on Judah.*

Ask people to read out the following verses:

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|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| • Gen 25.21-30 | * 2 Kings 8.20-22 |
| • Num 20.14-20 | * Psalm 137.7 |
| • 2 Sam 8.13-14 | * Ezekiel 35.5-6 & 15 |

3. How would you describe the relationship between Israel and Edom now you know some of the back story? How might that influence God's judgement on them?
4. Read **Verses 15-16**. What seems to have changed in these verses (*N.B. Leader – the prophecy is now referring to all nations not just Edom*)

Read Aloud: *Edom here is a case study, or parable representing the fate of all nations. 'Edom' is the same word as 'Adam' in Hebrew – translated as 'Humanity'. So, Edom's pride is an example of the wider human condition.*

5. In what way are modern nations (or even international organisations and multinational companies) prideful about their own defences/security/resources. How far would you say we buy in, or contribute to that?

Read **Verses 19-21**

6. a. light does this shed on God's purpose for Edom and other nations?
b. Since God's purpose is to bring all nations and peoples into his kingdom of justice, how do you think we should interact with individuals, organisations or nations (including our own) that seem full of pride?

Response:

Jesus taught his disciples to love their enemies and pray for those in authority. Spend some time praying for those individuals, organisations or nations that you have identified as in rebellion towards God by being proud of their own security. Pray for yourselves for wisdom to know how to engage and respond in word, deed and attitude.



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Study 4. Micah – Warning & Hope (Part 1)

Aim: To consider divine judgement, what it reveals about God and our response to injustice today.

To start with (6-7 minutes):

- On a piece of paper spend 90 seconds creating a mind-map of things the group associates with the word: **Covenant**
- Now do the same with their associations with the word: **Justice**
- Finally, do the same with the word: **Judgement**

Compare your 3 mind-maps. What strikes you about them?

Read aloud: *The Book of Micah swings between two things: Warnings of God's judgement for Israel's sin and promises of restoration and hope. It is rooted in his Covenant with Israel and his promises to their ancestor Abraham; to bless them in order that they might be a blessing to the nations.*

Engaging the text:

Read **Micah 1.1-4**

1. Understanding something about events of the time helps us understand Micah's prophecies. Read the following and summarise their reign in 1 sentence.
 - Jotham: 2 Kings 15.32-38
 - Ahaz: 2 Kings 16.1-4
 - Hezekiah: 2 Kings 18.1-8

2. Micah is explicit about the crimes of Israel and how they have broken the covenant. Give pairs some of the following passages (make sure all of them are covered) and work out:
 - What has been done (or not done)
 - Who is responsible?
 - What are the consequences?

Feedback to build a picture of God's complaint about the state of his nation.

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| • Micah 1.5-7 | * Micah 3.1-4 |
| • Micah 2.1-5 | * Micah 3. 5-7 |
| • Micah 2.6-11 | * Micah 3.9-12 |

3. Based on these accusations, how would you describe the state of Israel, the state of the Covenant and God's response of judgement?
4. We are not the nation of Israel nor under the old covenant. None the less God's Kingdom values of justice, dignity for the poor and vulnerable, and faithfulness to Him are what he wants in the world.
 - Today where do we see these same crimes being committed?
 - How far might these accusations aimed at rich and religious people apply to us?
 - How do we balance that challenge with the grace we have through Jesus?



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5. Because we are so globally connected, we can feel overwhelmed by the extent of poverty and exploitation. Some people become passive and ignore the issues, others (of all faiths and none) engage in trying to make the world a fairer place. What might it look like for us to follow in Jesus' footsteps (as a community and individuals) in how we respond to today's injustices and abuses of the poor?

Response:

Spend some time in reflection and prayer asking God for an eternal perspective but also how he would specifically have you serve him and use the blessings he has given you, to be a blessing to those in need.



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Study 5. Micah – Warning and Hope (Part 2)

Aim: To consider the promises God made to his people after warning them about their injustices and betrayals of the covenant, and to consider how we respond to God's promises.

To Start with:

What's the best promise that has ever been made (and kept!) to you?

Read Aloud: In chapters 1-3 Micah is very clear that God is angry at the powerful and religious in Israel who have exploited the poor and broken the Covenant. However, he also follows the warnings of judgement with three promises of restoration and hope.

Engaging the text.

Promise 1.

Read **Micah 4.1-7**

1. a. What strikes you about these promises? (What image do they paint in your imagination?)
b. Who will they benefit and in what way?
c. Try to sum up this promise in three words or less.

Promise 2.

Read **Micah 5. 1-5**

2. a. What do you think Micah's original hearers thought a ruler from Bethlehem was going to be like and do? (N.B. *King David was a Benjaminite so they were probably expecting a 'David' – a warrior king to unite the nation*)
b. This passage is interpreted by Christians to prophecy Jesus – how far do you think that's a legitimate interpretation? Why/why not? (*Matt 2.1-6, Luke 4.16-22, Mk 11.1-10, Mk 15.29-39 might help if people are struggling but don't feel you have to look them up otherwise*)
c. Try to sum up this promise in three words or less

Promise 3.

Read **Micah 5.7-15**

3. A. What strikes you about this promise? Why would it be particularly encouraging for the nation of Israel?
b. How would you summarise the promises in this passage in three words or less?

Drawing the Threads Together

4. If you consider these three promises what do they tell us about the character of God - the promise giver?
5. A. Given the state of Israel at the time (filled with injustice, corruption and abuse of the poor as discussed last week) how easy do you think it would have been for people to believe these promises of hope? What might have helped them?

B. How can we learn to trust God when the world around us seems to bleak? (*People may have testimonies of how they have learnt to do that*)
6. Today we live in the light of these, and many other promises from God. Which do you find most comforting, encouraging and difficult to believe in? Why?

Response:

Spend some time praying for each other in the light of the promises God has made to us – that we may grow in faith in Him and be able to live faithfully in the light of them.