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Frank W. Nelte

UNDERSTANDING THE MINOR PROPHETS

We always want to get a better understanding of prophecy. Prophecy always attracts a lot of interest, because it holds the prospect of knowing what will happen in the future. So without going into too many details, here are some points of general information that should help to get a clearer perspective when we read the books making up the Minor Prophets.

To start with, the Book of Revelation gives us the most complete framework for end-time prophecies. Other end-time prophecies all fit into this framework. In some way most other prophecies fit into the 7 Seals, the 7 Trumpets and the 7 Last Plagues, which events are then followed by the millennium and future eternity beyond that.

The 12 Minor Prophets all comprise ONE book in the inspired Hebrew canon. That's how God designed it. So we would expect all of these 12 books to tie together in some way. This they do indeed.

The 12 books fall into 3 time-periods during which they were written:

Books 1-7 = Hosea - Nahum = the Assyrian Period

Books 8-9 = Habakkuk - Zephaniah = the Babylonian Period

Books 10-12 = Haggai - Malachi = the Restoration Period

Each of these 12 books offers us 2 CLUES regarding its dominant subject matter:

A) the meaning of the name of the Prophet

B) the Specific Purpose Statement (S.P.S.) in the first 4 verses of each book

The overall story-flow in these 12 books of the Minor Prophets is much easier to follow when it is presented in the form of a chart, even when such a chart may have some gaps in it. Over the years I have often used such a chart in sermons and in Bible Studies about the Minor Prophets.

You can easily make your own version of this chart. Take a large piece of paper and do the following:

Across the top we picture the sequence of events based on the book of Revelation. It is NOT a time scale, but simply A SEQUENCE OF EVENTS. So across the top, from left to right, we draw in vertical columns for the 7 seals, the 7 trumpets and the 7 plagues, followed by the millennium and the 100-year period for the second resurrection, followed by eternity beyond the time of the new heaven and the new earth.

Down the left-hand side we list all 12 minor prophets, grouped into the 3 distinct time periods. Draw one horizontal line under the name of every book. Have a one-line gap after the Book of Nahum, and another one-line gap after the Book of Zephaniah. This gives us three clear groups for the 12 books from Hosea to Malachi.

In this way our chart forms a grid. Then, as we study each book, we can mark an "X" in the squares representing the events that are the main theme of that book. For example, if a book deals primarily with the Great Tribulation, then we can mark an "X" into that box (i.e. Seal #5) on the horizontal line for that particular book; if another book deals primarily with the first woe, then we can mark an "X" in that box (i.e. Trumpet #5) on the horizontal line for that particular book, and so forth. Some books may require several "X"'s (i.e. they clearly discuss a number of the events outlined in the Book of Revelation).

Now some books may be somewhat difficult to place into the framework of Revelation. In that case it may prove helpful to consider how the books before it and after it tie into the whole picture, perhaps giving some additional clues this way.

Let's now briefly examine all 12 of these books. We'll first consider the meaning of the prophet's name, then we'll examine the purpose statement found in the opening verses of each of these books, and then we'll also briefly summarize each message.

1) HOSEA

HOSEA means : SALVATION

S.P.S. = Hosea 1:2,4

> THE BEGINNING of the word of the LORD by Hosea. And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, [departing] from the LORD. (Hosea 1:2)

This is "the beginning" or opening part of this greater book (of 12 prophets), and it pictures a situation where the land has sinned and has "departed from the Eternal".

> And the LORD said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little [while], and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel. (Hosea 1:4)

God is saying: I WILL CAUSE ISRAEL TO GO INTO THE TRIBULATION!

So for the Book of Hosea we can put an "X" in our charts under the Great Tribulation, Seal #5.

This book discusses AN OVERVIEW OF GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION, starting with Israel in captivity. Three key words are mentioned, two of which have their meanings reversed within the space of a few verses. The third word already inherently has two different meanings. These three words are:

POSITIVE MEANINGS: NEGATIVE MEANINGS:

Jezreel (I will sow) Jezreel (I will scatter)

Ruhamah (Obtaining mercy) Lo-Ruhamah (Not obtaining mercy)

Ammi (My People) Lo-Ammi (Not my People).

When a farmer in Israel "sowed" his seeds, he would do so by "scattering" the seeds over the land, thus giving both of these meanings (i.e. to sow and to scatter) to the word "Jezreel".

Hosea 1:4 = call his name Jezreel because I will SCATTER Israel;

Hosea 1:6 = call her Lo-Ruhamah because I will NOT HAVE MERCY and Israel will go into the Tribulation;

Hosea 1:9 = call him Lo-Ammi for you are NOT MY PEOPLE any more;

Hosea 1:11 = upon Christ's return this will all be reversed;

Hosea 1:11 = then God will SOW (Jezreel) Israel again (see Hosea 2:22);

Hosea 2:1 = Israel will again BECOME GOD'S PEOPLE;

Hosea 2:1 = Israel will again OBTAIN MERCY.

The rest of the book expands on these terms, though mainly on the first 3, which all refer to the Great Tribulation.

Thus the 1st book of the Assyrian Period starts off with the Great Tribulation, when Assyria will be at the height of its power. Let's keep this in mind when we look at the 7th book of the Assyrian Period, the book of Nahum.

2) JOEL

JOEL means : GOD IS LORD OR RULER

S.P.S. = Joel 1:2

> Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? (Joel 1:2)

The question is: has anything like "THIS" ever happened in the past? The answer is: NO, because it is for the future. By "this" are meant THE EVENTS THAT ARE DESCRIBED IN THE REST OF THE BOOK OF JOEL. Predicting these events proves that God rules!

This description is quite similar to the one found in Habakkuk. A brief outline is:

Joel 1:4-5 = 3rd Seal

Joel 1:6-7 = 5th Seal

Joel 1:15 = 7th Seal

Joel 1:17-19 = 1st Trumpet

Joel 1:20 = 3rd trumpet

Joel 2:1-10 = 6th trumpet

Joel 2:15-27 = 7th trumpet

Joel 3:2-14 = 6th Plague

Joel 3:16 = 7th Plague

Joel 3:17-21 = the millennium beyond

After the Book of Hosea has set THE THEME for all 12 of the minor prophets, that being a discussion of end-time events that will lead to "salvation", the Book of Joel now gives something of AN OVERVIEW. This overview is similar to what we find in the Book of Revelation, but not as complete. Where the complete overview in Revelation is from a worldwide perspective, the perspective here in Joel seems to highlight those events that will particularly affect the Middle East.

So for Joel we can mark the "X"'s on our chart under the 3rd + 5th + 7th Seals, the 1st + 3rd + 6th + 7th Trumpets and the 6th + 7th Plagues. This Book of Joel is an "inset" book. The story-flow for the whole book of the Minor Prophets will continue with some of the following books.

3) AMOS

AMOS means : BURDEN or LOAD (i.e. PUNISHMENT)

S.P.S. = Amos 1:2

> And he said, The LORD will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither. (Amos 1:2)

In this book penalties from God are pronounced ... first on 6 non-Israelite nations and then on Judah and Israel. Of the 146 verses the first 16 are devoted to the non-Israelite nations. The rest of the book is addressed to Judah and Israel. Amos focuses on WHAT will happen, without necessarily focusing in on the WHEN.

Other scriptures show that Judah and Israel are punished at the Tribulation, and the non-Israelite nations are punished at either the 1st or 2nd Woe. Much of this book describes Israelite society leading up to the Tribulation, in a similar way to Micah.

Thus Amos is also difficult to mark with certainty on our charts, though the content can be readily understood. Perhaps the references to the punishment of the non-Israelite nations takes place during the 1st Woe, and so we might make a tentative "X" for Amos under Trumpet #5 from that perspective?

4) OBADIAH

OBADIAH means : SERVANT OF THE LORD

S.P.S. = Obadiah 1:1

> The vision of Obadiah. Thus saith the Lord GOD concerning Edom; We have heard a rumour from the LORD, and an ambassador is sent among the heathen, Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle. (Obadiah 1:1)

This talks about the punishment of Edom.

Key verses:

Obadiah 1:10 and Obadiah 1:13 = Edom was against Israel in the Tribulation, and they will be destroyed.

Daniel 11:41 seems to imply that Edom escapes the 1st Woe; so this Book of Obadiah probably applies to the 2nd Woe.

So let's mark the "X" for Obadiah under the 2nd Woe on our chart.

5) JONAH

JONAH means : DOVE

S.P.S. = Jonah 1:2

> Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. (Jonah 1:2)

The timing of this book is shown in Jonah 3:4:

> And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. (Jonah 3:4)

Revelation 9 shows that the 1st Woe lasts for 5 months. Perhaps the Book of Jonah means that after 3 months and 20 days of the 1st Woe have passed, Assyria will need to receive the warning of Jonah : "yet 40 days and you will be overthrown"? Where historically Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, the indications are that this time around Assyria will not repent?

So let's mark our "X" for Jonah into our chart at the end of the 1st Woe.

6) MICAH

MICAH means : WHO IS LIKE GOD?

S.P.S. = Micah 1:2-3

> Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is: and let the Lord GOD be witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. For, behold, the LORD cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. (Micah 1:2-3)

What follows is a description of the wicked and corrupt society in "Israel" just before the 2nd coming of Christ. This is another "inset" book. Some key sections in this book are:

Micah 1:1 = this applies to Judah AND Israel

Micah 1:3 = 2nd coming of Christ is very near

Micah 1:9,13,16 = Israel is IN captivity; so the book as a whole seems to be placed sometime AFTER the tribulation has started?

Micah 2:1-2 = society and its evils ... greed

Micah 3:1-2, 11 = leaders in Israel are corrupt

Micah 4:1-2 = Christ will replace them and rule

Micah 4:9-10 = but meanwhile there will be captivity

Micah 5:2, 5-6 = Christ's rule will destroy Assyria/Babylon

Micah 6:2-12 = Israelite society and its evils

Micah 7:2-6 = a corrupt society

Being more a description of conditions extant in society rather than of specific events, Micah is more difficult to place in our chart, but would probably belong somewhere between the Tribulation and the 2nd Woe?

7) NAHUM

NAHUM means : TO CONSOLE and TO AVENGE

S.P.S. = Nahum 1:1-2

> The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. God [is] jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and [is] furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth [wrath] for his enemies. (Nahum 1:1-2)

This book talks about the destruction of Assyria, which will happen in the 2nd Woe. So we can mark our "X" for Nahum in the space for the 2nd Woe. Nahum follows in time sequence right after the Book of Jonah.

This is the last book of the Assyrian Period , and it shows the total destruction of Assyria. We can read it as a description of the 2nd Woe. So where the 1st book of the Assyrian Period (Hosea) shows Assyria at the height of its end-time power, the 7th book of the Assyrian Period (Nahum) shows the final destruction of the Assyrian power.

The next book is the first of two books that were written during the Babylonian Period.

8) HABAKKUK

HABAKKUK means : LOVE'S EMBRACE

S.P.S. = Habakkuk 1:2-3

> O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! [even] cry out unto thee [of] violence, and thou wilt not save! Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause [me] to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence [are] before me: and there are [that] raise up strife and contention. (Habakkuk 1:2-3)

In this context of world troubles it asks the question: HOW LONG STILL UNTIL THE 2ND COMING OF CHRIST? In answer to this question God gives a run-down of end-time events, starting with God's Work and going on through the 3rd Woe. We might say this book is an "inset" in the story-flow.

A brief outline:

Habakkuk 1:3-4 = a lawless and liberal society

Habakkuk 1:5 = God's Church and Work in this context

Habakkuk 1:6-10 = the Great Tribulation

Habakkuk 1:11-17 = 5th Trumpet or 1st Woe (compare to Daniel 11:38, 44)

Habakkuk 2:1-4 = FAITH is vital under such conditions

Habakkuk 2:5-19 = 6th Trumpet, or 2nd Woe (esp. Habakkuk 2:5, 8)

Habakkuk 2:20 = God is still in control

Habakkuk 3:2 = the Work of Habakkuk 1:5 has been replaced by a "famine" and in the midst of these troubles they'll say: "revive your Work"

Habakkuk 3:3-16 = 7th Trumpet, the 2nd coming of Christ

Habakkuk 3:5 = 1st plague

Habakkuk 3:8 = 2nd + 3rd plagues

Habakkuk 3:11 = perhaps 4th + 5th plagues?

Habakkuk 3:12 = 7th plague

Habakkuk 3:18-19 = rejoice at Christ's 2nd coming; THIS ANSWERS THE QUESTION OF HABAKKUK 1:2 ... HOW LONG ...?

Right, on our chart we can now enter a few "X"'s for Habakkuk. Let's do this under 5th Seal, 5th + 6th + 7th Trumpets, 1st + 2nd + 3rd + 4th + 5th + 7th Plagues.

<u>9) ZEPHANIAH</u>

ZEPHANIAH means : GOD HAS HIDDEN

S.P.S. = Zephaniah 1:2-3

> 2 I will utterly consume all [things] from off the land, saith the LORD. 3 I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumbling blocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD. (Zephaniah 1:2-3)

This is a discussion of the 3rd Woe. It is God's wrath that had been hidden. Thus the 9th book, the last book of the Babylonian Period, shows the utter destruction of this world's Babylonian system. Revelation

chapters 17-18 tie in here. Some key verses:

Zephaniah 1:14-18 = 7th Trumpet, Day of Wrath = 7 last plagues;

Zephaniah 2:1-15 = the 3rd Woe and its effects;

Zephaniah 3:8 = the 6th and 7th plagues;

Zephaniah 3:9-20 = the millennium and beyond.

So we can mark our "X" for Zephaniah under the 3rd Woe; i.e. under all of the 7 last plagues.

Can we now see something of a pattern emerging ... starting with the Tribulation, then the end of 1st Woe, the 2nd Woe and now the 3rd Woe? Where the last book of the Assyrian Period (Nahum) deals with the final destruction of Assyria (i.e. the 2nd Woe), the last book of the Babylonian Period (Zephaniah) deals with the final destruction of Babylon (i.e. the 3rd Woe).

The last 3 books are from the "Restoration Period" and they continue this progression.

God restores this earth in 3 steps, each pictured by a Feast or Holy Day. Thus the Book of Haggai is associated with the Day of Trumpets, Zechariah is associated with the Feast of Tabernacles, and Malachi is associated with the Last Great Day. Stated another way, these three steps of restoration focus on: Christ's return (Haggai), then the millennium (Zechariah), and then the 100-year period and the lake of fire (Malachi). THEN THE RESTORATION WILL BE COMPLETE! So Malachi concludes the Minor Prophets.

<u>10) HAGGAI</u>

HAGGAI means : MY FEAST

S.P.S. = Haggai 1:2

> Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built. (Haggai 1:2)

People think it's too early for the millennium to start, right after the discussion of the 3rd Woe. But "Haggai" tells us that God's Feasts and Holy Days reveal THE WAY God will restore the Earth.

All 3 Restoration Books conclude with either a reference to, or a description of, a Feast or a Holy Day.

Haggai 1:1 = the year immediately after the fall of Babylon ... i.e. early into the millennium.

What follows are 4 messages to 4 different groups of people:

1ST MESSAGE: Haggai 1:1-11 = to Zerubbabel AND Joshua = BUILD GOD'S HOUSE!

Haggai 1:12-15 = a good response;

2ND MESSAGE: Haggai 2:1-9 = to Zerubbabel AND Joshua AND the people = REMEMBER THE FORMER GLORY AND BE STRONG!

3RD MESSAGE: Haggai 2:10-19 = to the priests = THE PEOPLE ARE UNCLEAN BEFORE GOD (at beginning of millennium) AND THEREFORE NEED TO REPENT. THIS REQUIRES TEACHING!

Haggai 2:17-19 = consider the blessings that repentance & obedience bring with them

4TH MESSAGE: Haggai 2:20-23 = to Zerubbabel = THIS MESSAGE PICTURES THE DAY OF TRUMPETS, THE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST.

"A signet" is someone who identified the true God, i.e. Christ will at the start of the millennium point out to humanity who really was His true servant at the end-time.

Anyway, for Haggai we can make our "X" on the chart at THE BEGINNING OF THE MILLENNIUM!

11) ZECHARIAH

ZECHARIAH means : GOD HAS REMEMBERED

S.P.S. = Zechariah 1:2-6

> The LORD hath been sore displeased with your fathers. Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. Be ye not as your fathers ... (Zechariah 1:2-4)

At the beginning of the millennium Christ says: look at your relatives, who died because they refused to repent. Therefore you had better repent right now!

From Zechariah 1:8 to Zechariah 6:8 the prophet sees 8 consecutive visions, all in one night. This is followed by a series of prophecies and the book ends with THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES.

What "God has remembered" is what mankind has gone through ... the subject of the 8 visions, and His plan of salvation for all mankind.

The 8 visions very briefly:

VISION 1 = Zechariah 1:8-17 = imminence of the 1st Woe (Zechariah 1:15 is a key)

VISION 2 = Zechariah 1:18-21 = the 2nd Woe ... (4 main nations to punish Europe?)

VISION 3 = Zechariah 2:1-13 = calling Israel out of captivity

VISION 4 = Zechariah 3:1-10 = Joshua ... the ministry at the end-time?

VISION 5 = Zechariah 4:1-14 = Zerubbabel ... the Work and the 2 witnesses

(It is interesting that the 2 witnesses feature in this exact time context, just before the 3rd Woe.)

VISION 6 = Zechariah 5:1-4 = the curse = the 3rd Woe

VISION 7 = Zechariah 5:5-11 = the punishment of Babylon

VISION 8 = Zechariah 6:1-8 = the 4 chariots ...?

(I don't have an explanation for these 4 chariots. They are different from the "horses & riders" of Revelation 6. I would guess that they perhaps tie in with the 7 last plagues in some way? But I really don't know for sure.)

The rest of chapter 6 talks about Christ and those in the first resurrection, which follows all these visions. Then the following chapters are devoted to discussing various prophetic things. In chapter 14 the book concludes with a discussion of the Feast of Tabernacles (see Zechariah 14:16-19), step #2 in God's plan of restoration.

So for Zechariah we can mark our "X" under the whole millennium.

Now let's look at the 3rd and final step in God's restoration.

12) MALACHI

MALACHI means : MY MESSENGER

S.P.S. = Malachi 1:2

> I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? [Was] not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, (Malachi 1:2)

This book completes the restoration of mankind having access to God, and establishing the government of God over this Earth.

THIS BOOK IS ADDRESSED TO THOSE WHO DON'T SEE GOD'S LOVE FOR THEM!

In other words, to state it very clearly: this book is addressed to those who end up in the lake of fire! It is a very strong warning.

It is called "My Messenger" because Jesus Christ, the Messenger, explains the successive steps that lead to the lake of fire. This succession of steps is shown in the form of 8 questions and God's answers, which explain WHY they end up in the lake of fire.

A brief overview:

QUESTION 1 = Malachi 1:2 = people who don't see God's love for them

QUESTION 2 = Malachi 1:6 = this leads to a lack of respect and despising

QUESTION 3 = Malachi 1:7 = this leads to polluted teachings and contempt

(Malachi 1:8 to Malachi 2:13 = a long section on God's law, which law these people don't really understand.)

QUESTION 4 = Malachi 2:14 = this leads to immorality and treachery

QUESTION 5 = Malachi 2:17 = this leads to condoning evil (loving it)

QUESTION 6 = Malachi 3:7 = they obviously don't see the need to repent

QUESTION 7 = Malachi 3:8 = this leads to robbing God

QUESTION 8 = Malachi 3:13 = the last straw ... a totally rebellious attitude

This progression for people who end up in the lake of fire is very clear. It all starts off with these people not really appreciating THE ENORMOUS SACRIFICES that God the Father and Jesus Christ were willing to make, so that salvation for us human beings could even be possible. They have no gratitude for the unbelievable ordeal Jesus Christ went through ... FOR US! They don't see God's love! And from that start things just go downhill, as brought out into the open by God's statements and people's questions 2-8 in response to these statements.

The questions people ask God make clear that they don't see their own guilt and their wrongs! They are the people who are heading for the lake of fire.

Malachi 4:1-3: The only place this progression can end with is the lake of fire. The lake of fire represents the LAST PART of the Last Great Day. Thereafter the restoration is completed with the new heaven and the new earth and the New Jerusalem.

So for Malachi we can mark our "X" under the 100-year period after the millennium, culminating in the lake of fire.

So we have now completed our chart.

For the books of Joel and Habakkuk we have references to a number of different end-time events, somewhat like overviews. From the other books we see a progression from Seal #5 (Great Tribulation) in the Book of Hosea, to Trumpet #5 (1st Woe) in Amos, to the end of Trumpet #5 (1st Woe) in Jonah, to Trumpet #6 (2nd Woe) in Nahum, to Trumpet #7 (3rd Woe) in Zephaniah, to the start of the millennium (Day of Trumpets) in Haggai, to the whole millennium (Feast of Tabernacles) in Zechariah, to the lake of fire (Last Great Day) in Malachi. Obviously each of these books also discusses things that don't strictly fit into this progression. Also, the book of Micah doesn't fit into this progression. Micah seems to be a straight-forward discussion of a wicked end-time society, without reference to some specific point in time.

When we look at this progression, it would almost seem like the Book of Obadiah should fit into Trumpet #5 (the 1st Woe), though the statement in the Book of Daniel seems to indicate that the punishment of Edom will only occur at the time of Trumpet #6 (the 2nd Woe)? But that's the problem with the charts we draw up ... not everything always fits as it should, right?

And yes, perhaps some of the "X"'s on our chart are not totally accurate? Perhaps some should be shifted to other locations? However, the general picture that emerges should be helpful in seeing many of the statements in all these books in a more correct perspective.

My discussion of each book has been rather brief. I have not tried to drive home the various points I have presented, as that would make this article very lengthy. Instead, I have merely given you enough to point you in certain directions. You can follow those leads up in your own study of this part of the Bible.

Frank W. Nelte