

Responding to God's Faithful Intervention

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Minor Prophets Part 2

This inductive Bible study is designed for individual, small group, or classroom use. A leader's guide with full lesson plans and the answers to the Bible study questions is available from Regular Baptist Press. Order RBP0041 online at www.regularbaptistpress.org, e-mail orders@rbpstore.org, call toll-free 1-800-727-4440, or contact your distributor.

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The Doctrinal Basis of Our Curriculum

A more detailed statement with references is available upon request.

- The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures
- Only one true God
- The Trinity of the Godhead
- The Holy Spirit and His ministry
- The personality of Satan
- The Genesis account of creation
- Original sin and the fall of man
- The virgin birth of Christ
- Salvation through faith in the shed blood of Christ
- The bodily resurrection and priesthood of Christ
- Grace and the new birth
- Justification by faith
- Sanctification of the believer
- The security of the believer
- The church
- The ordinances of the local church: baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper
- Biblical separation—ecclesiastical and personal
- Obedience to civil government
- The place of Israel
- The pretribulation rapture of the church
- The premillennial return of Christ
- The millennial reign of Christ
- Eternal glory in Heaven for the righteous
- Eternal torment in Hell for the wicked

RESPONDING TO GOD'S FAITHFUL INTERVENTION: MINOR PROPHETS PART 2

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Preface

God's Word never becomes irrelevant because God never becomes irrelevant. We can study His interaction with His people and the ancient nations of the world as recorded in the Minor Prophets and gain a greater understanding of Him. What we learn about God can be transforming since the God of the prophets is the same faithful God we serve today.

We call the last twelve books of the Old Testament the Minor Prophets, not because they are unimportant but because they are shorter in length than Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. In this study you will get to know the last six of these twelve prophets.

Nahum vividly pictured God's fiery judgment against wicked opposition, a sobering reminder that the God of love is also a God of justice. Habakkuk openly discussed with God his struggle to reconcile national and international evil with God's holiness and power. The Lord's direct involvement in this world's affairs became the focal point for Zephaniah as God revealed details of the future "day of the Lord." Haggai uncovered the sins of ritualistic worship and materialism. "The LORD remembers" (the meaning of the name Zechariah) His promises to His people, and He is sovereign over human history. Malachi asserted that the Lord also treats people fairly, condemning rebels but rewarding those who respect Him.

Be prepared to be awed and humbled by God's revelation of Himself. Focus on Him and allow the Spirit to change your heart as you get to know the God of the Minor Prophets better.

Lesson 1

God Gave Prophets

God requires obedience to His revealed will.

Deuteronomy 18:9–22

“And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him” (Deuteronomy 18:19).

The fortune cookie. Go into almost any Chinese restaurant in the world, and you'll find it—but not in China.

The “Chinese” fortune cookie, that crisp cookie surrounding a piece of paper with words of wisdom or prophecy, is actually Japanese in origin. And the world's largest fortune cookie manufacturer is in Brooklyn, New York.

The “fortune” in the cookie is as valid as the cookie is Chinese. But Americans enjoy reading such gems as these:

- A good time to keep your mouth shut is when you're in deep water.
- You can always find happiness at work on Friday.
- He who throws dirt is losing ground.
- You are about to become \$8.95 poorer (\$6.95 if you had the buffet).
- One who admires you greatly is hidden before your eyes.
- Your many hidden talents will become obvious to those around you.

Getting Started

1. How much stock do you put in a fortune from a cookie?

2. Why are people compelled to read their “fortunes” when they open a fortune cookie?

3. Why are most people so interested in knowing about their future?

God gave Israel prophets as a means of revealing His will and accurately predicting the future. God also warned them against using other means to determine the future.

Searching the Scriptures

The demonic realm with all of its books, spells, and fortune-telling stands in direct opposition to Christ and His Word. This was true in Moses' day and in Paul's day, and it is still true today.

God Hates Witchcraft and Magic

In Paul's day, the word of the Lord prevailed mightily in the city of Ephesus (Acts 19:20). Citizens of Ephesus trusted Christ and repented of their sins (v. 18), and many of those who had practiced “curious arts” publicly burned their books (v. 19). These people had used magic and incantations in an attempt to predict and control the future.

Centuries earlier, people in ancient Canaan used magic and incantations to foretell the future. Such attempts were an abomination to the Lord. He forbade the people of Israel from getting involved in the abominations of magic, witchcraft, divination, sorcery, or necromancy.

While God condemned these Satanic ways of attempting to know or control the future, He did still want His people to know certain things about the future. Therefore, He revealed some future events to prophets and commanded them to announce those events to His people.

Unlike the forecasts of the magicians, the predictions of God's prophets were 100 percent accurate, because they were the plans of Al-

mighty God. Unlike the enchanters, the prophets sought to glorify God and preach His message.

As God was preparing to take the people of Israel into the Promised Land, He instructed Moses to repeat many of the commands of the law. The book of Deuteronomy, meaning “second law,” records this re-statement. God did not want His people to learn the abominable practices of the Canaanite nations.

4. Read Deuteronomy 18:9–11. What nine detestable practices did God not want His people to learn from the Canaanite people?

First, the Canaanite peoples believed that child sacrifice provided the strongest magic. Magic for them involved obliging or compelling their gods to take care of them. They thought that their gods, such as Molech, would be forced to act on their behalf after they had made their sons or daughters “to pass through the fire.”

Second, Moses mentioned divination. This practice included interpreting signs, for example rains or droughts, in order to predict the future.

Third, Moses listed “an observer of times,” also known as a soothsayer (Micah 5:12). This individual tried to control people and the future by demonic power.

The fourth abomination in the register is the enchanter, who tried to determine the future by interpreting omens like the flight of birds or the entrails of a sacrificial animal or the flames of a fire.

Fifth, the text refers to the witch, or sorcerer, who tried to control the gods and the future with incantations.

The sixth detestable thing was the charmer, who cast spells in order to bind people to his own will.

The seventh individual consulted with familiar spirits and tried to function as a medium between demons and people who had questions about the future.

The wizard is the eighth on the roll of abominations. This person

supposedly communicated with the spirits of dead people in order to determine the future.

The final member of the list is the necromancer, who allegedly called up the dead in order to predict the future. Israel's first king, Saul, consulted a woman with a "familiar spirit," a female necromancer. The Lord had ceased to communicate with Saul because of his disobedience (1 Samuel 28:6, 7). King Saul asked the medium of Endor to call up Samuel from the dead to tell the king how the impending battle with the Philistines would turn out. The medium planned to call forth a demon who would act like Samuel, but God sent Samuel himself. Samuel's appearance caused the witch to cry out in fear (vv. 11–15). Then Samuel delivered a message from God—something that a demon would not do (vv. 16–19).

5. Do you know anyone who has tried to learn the future through modern examples of these methods? How confident was he or she in the method?

6. What evidence do you see in Deuteronomy 18:12 that shows that God took the demonic occupations of the Canaanites seriously?

These nine demonic occupations of the Canaanites were an abomination to the Lord. It was because of these offenses that the Lord drove the Canaanites out of the land and gave Canaan to Israel.

God expected the Israelites to be "perfect" (or blameless) of these sins (Deuteronomy 18:13). He would not allow His people to listen to the observers of times or to the diviners to determine the future (v. 14). Instead, God would raise up prophets who would declare the future with flawless precision (v. 22). God wanted the Israelites to be repulsed by even the thought of trying to determine the future through divination.

7. How prevalent today are references to spells, fortune-telling, communication with the dead, and witchcraft in media such as novels, TV shows, and movies?

8. How does the world typically respond to entertainment based on spells, witchcraft, etc.?

9. What should be the Christian's attitude toward such entertainment? Why?

God Sent Prophets

10. Read Deuteronomy 18:15. Why did God give prophets?

Moses, functioning in his role as a prophet, foretold that the Lord would raise up a Prophet. The prediction of this verse probably includes all the true prophets of the Lord, but its ultimate fulfillment came in the Person and ministry of Christ.

God kept His promise and sent prophets throughout Israel's history. These prophets would be Israelites ("from the midst of thee") who, like Moses, would speak God's words. They would have direct communication with God and bring deliverance to the people. Because the prophets would declare the word of the Lord, the Israelites were supposed to listen to them and obey God's revealed will.

11. Read Deuteronomy 18:16 and 17. Why had the people requested a prophet?

At Horeb, which is another name for Mount Sinai, the Israelites requested to neither hear the Lord's voice nor see the great fire any longer. The people were afraid that the fire would consume them and that they would die if they heard the Lord's voice anymore (Deuteronomy 5:25).

So they begged Moses to approach God, to hear all that God would say, and then to report back to them the Lord's words. The people also promised that they would listen to Moses' report and obey it (Deuteronomy 5:27). Essentially, they asked Moses to act as God's spokesman. Their petition pleased the Lord, as did their hearts' intention to obey (vv. 28, 29).

Israel's entreaty resulted in God's promise that He would raise up prophets from among the people, and that promise reached its final realization with the advent of Jesus Christ. God placed His words in the Prophet's mouth, and Jesus spoke all that God had commanded Him. God expected nothing less of all His prophets than complete fidelity to the divinely provided message (Deuteronomy 18:18).

God also expected His prophets to speak His words in His name (18:19). That is, the prophets were to function not only as God's spokesmen but also as His representatives.

God expected His people to listen to His words as spoken by the prophets. God would "require it" of anyone who would not listen, which means that God would punish the disobedient individual (see Acts 3:23).

God expected obedience. Disobedience was not an affront to the prophet, but was an offense against God and an indignity against His word. The prophets of God announced His will, so it comes as no surprise that God expected prompt obedience to their messages.

12. When a church is without a pastor, many members correctly

pray for God to send them the pastor they need. With this in mind, how should the church view the pastor God brings to them?

13. How do God's expectations for the prophets and people of Israel compare with His expectations for today's pastors and church members?

14. Read Deuteronomy 18:20. What punishment was required for a disobedient prophet?

A prophet who spoke a word in the Lord's name that God had not commanded him to speak was to die for acting so presumptuously. The punishment was the same for the prophet who spoke in the name of other gods. Since the Israelites were to obey the prophets with unquestioning obedience, any prophet who presumed to speak for God or who represented false gods was usurping God's authority.

If God expected obedience from all His people, then He surely required obedience of His representatives. Brazen violation of His will by prophets would result in the most severe penalty.

15. Read James 3:1. Why will teachers receive a stricter judgment?

God in His goodness provided the people of Israel with a twofold test to determine any word that God had not spoken (18:21).

16. Read Deuteronomy 18:21 and 22. What is the twofold test God provided to determine whether a prophet's words were from Him?

First, the true prophet was to speak in the name of the Lord (18:22a). He was to function as God's faithful representative, and he was not to speak on behalf of other gods (v. 20). The people were not to listen to any prophet who encouraged them to follow after other gods (Deuteronomy 13:1–4). They were to put him to death and thereby exterminate the evil from their midst (v. 5).

Second, the true prophets' predictions had to come to pass. This concept of flawless prediction is illustrated in Jeremiah 28:9. If a prophet prophesied of peace and peace took place, then that prophet was to be considered as sent by the Lord. The people were not to fear a prophet whose prophecies did not come to pass.

17. What attributes of God guaranteed complete accuracy of prediction by His prophets?

Making It Personal

18. How faithfully have you been listening to God's message to you in His Word?

19. How do you treat your church's pastor? Why is it important to respect your pastor and respond to the messages he brings?

20. Write a prayer for your pastor and his ministry in teaching and preaching God's Word.

21. Memorize Deuteronomy 18:19.