RESPONDING TO GOD'S FAITHFUL INTERVENTION

REGULAR BAPTIST PRESS
1300 North Meacham Road
Schaumburg, Illinois 60173-4806

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RESPONDING TO GOD'S FAITHFUL INTERVENTION:
MINOR PROPHETS PART 2
Adult Bible Study Leader's Guide
Vol. 59 • No. 3
© 2011 • Regular Baptist Press
www.regularbaptistpress.org • 1-800-727-4440
Printed in U.S.A.
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RBP0041 • ISBN: 978-1-60776-358-1

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How to Use *Life Design*



LIFE DESIGN: Bible Study Designed for the Life You Live. These Bible study materials are designed to engage adult learners in inductive Bible study and in applying the truths of that study to their daily lives.

As you prepare to teach these lessons, keep these two factors in mind:

- The FOCUS of productive adult Bible learning is the learner. The intent of teaching is not teaching, but learning—the learner's learning.
- The GOAL of productive adult Bible learning is an appropriate life-response to Biblical truth. You do not teach simply to impart information; you teach so that the Holy Spirit of God can use the truths of the Word of God to change the child of God into the image of the Son of God.

The Lesson Plan

Each *Life Design* lesson has three distinct parts. GETTING STARTED is the attention-getter. The questions and activities "set the table," as it were, for the Bible study. SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES is the heart of the lesson. A series of inductive Bible study questions leads the teacher and learners through the Biblical text. MAKING IT PERSONAL applies the truth to life.

As is true of any teaching experience, you can adapt the parts of the lesson to fit your particular class. You may choose to alter the beginning activities or change the focus of the application. You will find more material in the Bible study than you can cover in one class session. Ask God to help you as you tailor the lesson for your learners.

The Study Book

This leader's guide is designed to accompany the Bible study book. As the teacher, you will want a copy of the Bible study. Commit to working through the questions before you plan your lesson. We encourage you to distribute Bible study books to your learners. Urge them to complete the study before class. The more your learners have studied on their own, the better the class discussions will be. When a question in the leader's guide is picked up from the Bible study book, you will notice the question number in parentheses. The answers to the questions are usually in the lesson commentary. They are also grouped together in the back of this book.

Other Resources

If you want to use transparencies as you teach, a packet of sixteen full-color transparencies is available. If you prefer to use PowerPoint, the resource CD includes a PowerPoint presentation for each lesson.

Some teachers stay very close to the outline as they teach. If this is true of you, and if you want your learners to capture that outline, reproducible in-class worksheets are included on the CD. The same worksheets may be downloaded from the Web and photocopied for class members. Visit www.regularbaptistpress.org/downloads or www.rbpadultministries.org. Thank you for choosing *Life Design* teaching materials. May God richly bless you and your learners as you study and apply His Word.

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. This quarter we will study the last six of these twelve prophets who focus on the end of the kingdom of Judah and the post-exilic Jews.

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.

Approach this study 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 study and teach about the God of the Minor Prophets.

Resources for This Course

The transparency packet for this course (RBP0042) includes a transparency on which to record the summary statements from each lesson on the Minor Prophets. The transparency will help you track and review these lessons. Starting with lesson 1, use transparency 1 at the end of each lesson or at the beginning of the next lesson to record the summary statement for each lesson. You may use the suggestions in this leader's guide or ask your learners to suggest summary statements.

The Resource CD (RBP0043) for this course includes a PowerPoint presentation for each lesson. All of the transparencies are part of the PowerPoint presentation. The transparencies are also included on the CD as printable PDFs. If you would like to make your own transparencies or PowerPoint slides, the CD includes backgrounds ready for your own text.

To help in your promotion of this course, the CD includes a PowerPoint slide, posters, and a flyer. You can add your group's information to all of the promotional material.

The CD also provides in-class worksheets. Each in-class worksheet has a fill-in-the-blank outline that follows the corresponding outline in this leader's guide.

Other classroom resources on the CD include visuals. The leader's guide refers to each visual as a resource. Each resource is included in the corresponding PowerPoint presentation. Instructions on when to use the handouts are included in this leader's guide.

The CD also offers supplemental case studies. Each case study can be used as an in-class review, as material for a midweek Bible study, or as an e-mail attachment to your learners. E-mailing the case studies to your learners will emphasize living out the truth in daily life. You may want to enlist a learner to handle collecting e-mail addresses and e-mailing the case studies each week.

In addition, the CD includes a printable verse card for each lesson's key verse or verses. Blank verse cards are also included so you can enter different or additional verses for your learners to memorize. For your convenience, the verse cards are set for printing on Avery business cards. Use the Avery product number 8869 to avoid cutting apart the verse cards. You can find Avery business cards at avery.com. You could also simply print the verse cards on heavy paper and cut them apart using a paper cutter. Or you could e-mail the verse cards to your learners and have them print and cut their own.

LESSON 1

God Gave Prophets

Scripture Focus

Deuteronomy 18:9–22

Key Verse

"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).

Overview

God gave prophets to the people of ancient Israel as His mouthpiece, announcing His will to the people. A true prophet predicted the future with perfect accuracy. The prophet Moses predicted that God would raise up another Prophet similar to himself. This promised Prophet is Jesus Christ (Acts 3:22–26). God expected His people to reject other voices and to obey the words of the true prophets.

Topic

God's revealed will

Theme

God requires obedience to His revealed will.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will determine to obey promptly and joyfully God's revealed will for him or her.

Outline

I. The Pagan Practices (Deut. 18:9–14)
   A. The detestable customs (18:9–11)
   B. The punishment for their abominations (18:12)
   C. God's expectation (18:13, 14)
II. The Promised Prophet (Deut. 18:15–19)
   A. Moses' prediction (18:15)
   B. Israel's request (18:16, 17)
   C. God's expectations (18:18, 19)
III. The Presumptuous Prophet (Deut. 18:20–22)
   A. The punishment for presumption (18:20)
   B. The test for presumption (18:21, 22)

Materials

- **RBP transparencies 1—4**
- **Lesson 1 case study from resource CD**
- **Deuteronomy 18:19 verse card from resource CD**
- **Fortune cookies, one per learner**

Getting Started

Community Research

Research the number of fortune tellers/palm readers in and around your community. Bring your findings to class to share with the learners. **Ask:** How many fortune-tellers/palm readers practice their trade in and around our community? After learners have suggested their ideas, reveal your research findings. **Ask:** Why do you suppose people are willing to pay a stranger to tell their fortune?

Today's lesson deals with God's instructions concerning false prophets and our need to seek to know and do God's will.

Fortune Cookies

Provide fortune cookies for some or all of your class members. Have them open their fortune cookies and read their fortunes to the rest of the class. **Ask:** How much stock do you put in a fortune from a cookie? **Discuss:** Why are people compelled to read their "fortunes" when they open a fortune cookie? **Discuss:** Why are most people so interested in knowing about their future? (Questions 1–3)

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 to His Word. This was true in Moses' day and in Paul's day; it is still true today.

READ: Acts 19:17–20.

God's apostle Paul established the church in Ephesus. The Word of the Lord prevailed mightily in that city (Acts 19:20), and the Lord Jesus was magnified (v. 17b). 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 before Ephesus there were people in ancient Canaan who used magic and incantations in order to foretell the future. Such attempts at determining the future were an abomination to the Lord. God forbade the people of Israel from getting involved in the abominations of magic, witchcraft, divination, sorcery, or necromancy.

God did want His people, however, to know certain things about the future. Therefore, He revealed some future events to the prophets and commanded

them to announce those events to His people.

Unlike the forecasts of the magicians, the prophetic predictions were 100 percent accurate, because they were the plans of Almighty God. Unlike the enchanters, the prophets sought to glorify God and to preach His message.

I. The Pagan Practices (Deut. 18:9–14)

A. The detestable customs (18:9–11)

God instructed Moses to prepare the people of Israel for entering the Promised Land by repeating many of the commands of the law. The book of Deuteronomy, meaning "second law," records this restatement. God did not want His people to learn the abominable practices of the Canaanite nations.

READ: Deuteronomy 18:9–11. **ASK:** What are the nine detestable practices that God did not want His people to learn from the Canaanite people? (Question 4)

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. Thus 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. He 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 witch, a female necromancer, since the Lord had ceased to communicate with him due to the king's disobedience (1 Sam. 28:6, 7). King Saul asked the witch of Endor to call up Samuel from the dead in order to know how the impending battle with the Philistines would turn out. She 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 (28:11–15), and Samuel then delivered a message from God—something that a demon would not do (28:16–19).

DISCUSS: 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? (Question 5)

B. The punishment for their abominations (18:12)

READ: Deuteronomy 18:12. **ASK:** What evidence do you see in this verse that shows that God took the demonic occupations of the Canaanites seriously? (Question 6)

These nine demonic occupations of the Canaanites were an abomination to the Lord. Because of these offenses, the Lord would drive the Canaanites out of the land and give Canaan to Israel.

C. God's expectation (18:13, 14)

READ: Deuteronomy 18:13 and 14.

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

ASK: How prevalent today are references to spells, fortune-telling, communication with the dead, and witchcraft in media such as novels, TV shows, and movies? **ASK:** How does the world typically respond to entertainment based on spells, witchcraft, etc.? **DISCUSS:** What should be the Christian's attitude toward such entertainment? Why? (Questions 7–9)

Joshua, who was the immediate fulfillment to Moses' prophecy, could not compare with Moses, "whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. 34:10). The supreme Prophet is Jesus Christ. He has an infinitely closer relationship with the Father than that which belonged even to Moses. Jesus, as the Second Person of the Godhead, is "in the bosom of the Father" (John 1:18). Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant, which he received on Mount Sinai; Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant (Heb. 12:24).

II. The Promised Prophet (Deut. 18:15–19)

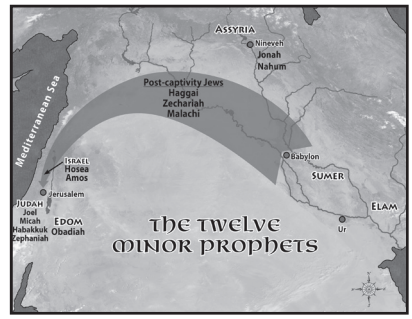
A. Moses' prediction (18:15)

READ: Deuteronomy 18:15. **ASK:** Why did God give prophets? (Question 10)

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.

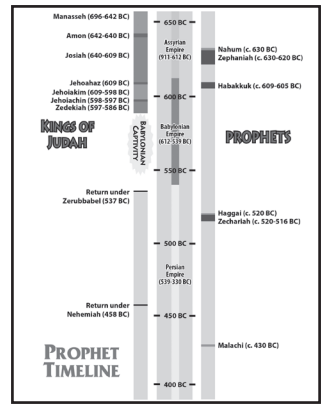
God kept His promise and sent prophets throughout Israel's history. These prophets would be Israelites ("from the midst of thee") who, like Moses, would speak God's words. They would have direct communication with God and bring deliverance to the people. Because the prophets would declare the word of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

TRANSPARENCY: Display transparency 2 as you mention the prophets to be studied.



Sixteen of the prophets wrote seventeen books of the Bible (Jeremiah wrote both Lamentations and Jeremiah). During the coming weeks we will examine the books of Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. These books appear at the very end of the Old Testament as the final six books in a section of twelve books called the Minor Prophets.

TRANSPARENCY: Display transparency 3 to show the timeline for the six prophets covered in this course.



We call them the Minor Prophets because they are relatively short when compared to the much longer books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Even though they are short in length, they have great value for Christians today.

B. Israel's request (18:16, 17)

READ: Deuteronomy 18:16 and 17. **ASK:** Why had the people requested a prophet? (Question 11)

The Israelites at Horeb, which is another name for Mount Sinai, had requested neither to hear the Lord's voice anymore nor to 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 (Deut. 5:25).

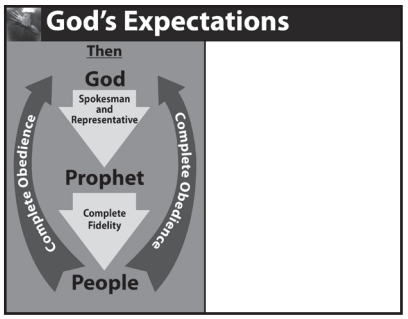
The Israelites begged Moses to approach God, to hear all that God would say, and then to report back to them the words of the Lord. The people also promised that they would listen to Moses' report and that they would obey it (5:27). Essentially, they asked Moses to act as God's spokesman. Their petition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

C. God's expectations (18:18, 19)

READ: Deuteronomy 18:18 and 19.

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

The Jews of the time of Jesus were still looking for the One Who would bring ultimate fulfillment to Moses' prophecy. Throughout the Gospel of John, people make reference to the Prophet (John 1:21; 6:14; 7:40), but for the most part they did not accept Jesus for Who He is (John 1:11). Peter explained that Jesus came in fulfillment of Moses' prophecy (Acts 3:11, 26). Moses had commanded the people to listen to the Prophet, and Peter warned that everyone who did not listen to Jesus (the promised Prophet) would be destroyed from among the people (Acts 3:23).



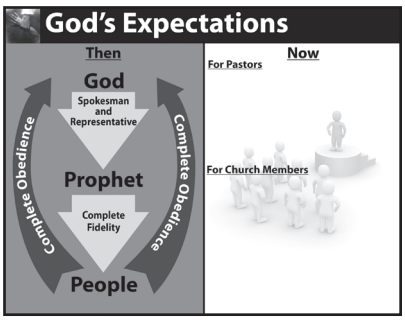
TRANSPARENCY: Display transparency 4 with the right half covered as you describe God's expectations for His prophets and His people.

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 also Acts 3:23).

God expected obedience. Disobedience was not an affront to the prophet but 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.

DISCUSS: When a church is without a pastor, many members correctly pray for God to send them the pastor that they need. With this in mind, how should the church view the pastor God brings to them? (Question 12)



Years later, Jeremiah lamented the condition of Israel's leaders. First, the priests did not direct the peoples' attention to the Lord. Second, the experts in the law of Moses did not know God. Third, the "pastors," or rulers, sinned against Him. Fourth, the prophets spoke in the name of Baal, a false god, and followed after things that did not profit (Jer. 2:8). (Note: The things that do not profit are probably idols [see v. 11]).

TRANSPARENCY: Display transparency 4. **DISCUSS:** How do God's expectations for the prophets and people of Israel compare with His expectations for today's pastors and church members? (Record learners' answers on the transparency.) (Question 13)

III. The Presumptuous Prophet (Deut. 18:20–22)

A. The punishment for presumption (18:20)

READ: Deuteronomy 18:20. **ASK:** What punishment was required for a disobedient prophet? (Question 14)

Any 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.

READ: James 3:1. **DISCUSS:** Why will teachers receive a stricter judgment? (Question 15)

B. The test for presumption (18:21, 22)

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

READ: Deuteronomy 18:21 and 22. **ASK:** What is the twofold test God provided to test whether a prophet's words were from Him? (Question 16)

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 (18:20). The people were not to listen to any prophet who encouraged them to follow after other gods (Deut. 13:1–4). They were to put him to death and thereby exterminate the evil from their midst (Deut. 13:5).

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

DISCUSS: What attributes of God guaranteed complete accuracy of prediction by His prophets? (Question 17)

TRANSPARENCY: Display transparency 2 again, highlighting the names of the prophets who will be studied in the coming weeks: Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Jeremiah also bemoaned the fact that prophets were prophesying lies in God's name. God had not sent them, nor had He commanded them to speak. They proclaimed messages that were false, demonic, worthless, and deceitful (Jer. 14:14). The false prophets told Israel not to worry about war or famine, but in poetic justice they and the people would be consumed by both war and famine (14:15, 16). Since the people would not carry out the punishment for presumptuous prophecy, God would inflict it Himself.



Making It Personal

Learning God's Will

Most of what God wants us to know is plainly revealed to us in His Word. We don't need to ask for a prophet to know God's message for us. We simply need to read His Word. **Ask:** How faithfully have you been listening to God's message to you in His Word? (Question 18)

Encourage your learners to commit, or stay committed, to spending time in God's Word and responding to God as they read His Word.

Respecting and Responding

Challenge your learners to consider how they treat your church's pastor. Help them understand the importance of respecting your pastor and responding to the messages he brings. (Question 19)

Spend time in class praying for your pastor and his ministry in teaching and preaching God's Word. (Question 20)

Use the case study for lesson 1 as desired.



Review Transparency

Use transparency 1 to review the response for this lesson: Obey God's revealed will.

Memory Verse

Distribute copies of the Deuteronomy 18:19 verse card from the resource CD. Encourage the learners to memorize the verse.