

The Minor Prophets

I. The Main Idea of the Minor Prophets

Through the twelve Minor Prophets, God confronts Israel with their covenant faithlessness and pronounces judgment on them, but also promises future restoration.

God also further develops the promise of a future Messiah who will lead the people, deliver them from harm, and sit on the throne of David.

II. Outline of the Minor Prophets

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| ▪ Hos., Joel, Amos, Obad., Jon., & Mic. | Sin: Covenant and Cosmic |
| ▪ Nah., Hab., Zeph. | Punishment: Covenant and Cosmic |
| ▪ Hag., Zech., Mal. | Restoration: Covenant and Cosmic |

Explanation:

"Covenant" refers to God's actions toward His covenant people, the Jews.

"Cosmic" refers to God's actions toward Gentiles and all of creation.

Note:

In the Hebrew Bible, the Minor Prophets are considered one book: "The Book of the Twelve."

III. Interpretive Keys to the Minor Prophets

Genre: Mostly Poetry, Some Narrative

The books are not in chronological order, but can be gathered into the following groups:

- Neo-Assyrian Period (ca. 912-605 B.C.): Hosea, Amos, Jonah, & Micah.
- Neo-Babylonian Period (ca. 626-539 B.C.): Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah.
- Persian Period (ca. 539-331 B.C.): Joel(?), Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

These prophets came from all over the land of Israel: northern kingdom and southern kingdom.

“The Day of the Lord”:

This phrase is used to refer to any point in history when God is acting decisively and powerfully against sinners. In the OT period there were relatively minor examples of a “day of the Lord.” But the Bible also predicts a future, final “Day of the Lord” when God will bring the final judgments on the earth.

- OT examples: Isaiah 13:6, 9; 58:13; Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Obad. 15; Zeph. 1:7, 8, 14; and Mal. 4:5.
- NT examples: Acts 2:20; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; and 2 Pet. 3:10.

One of the earliest of the writing prophets, Amos (8th century B.C.) had to correct the Israelites misunderstanding about the Day of the Lord. They assumed the Day of the Lord would be a time of blessing, but the prophet informs them that it will instead be a time of judgment.

Amos 5:18–20

“Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD!

Why would you have the day of the LORD?

“It is darkness, and not light,

as if a man fled from a lion,

and a bear met him,

“or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall,

and a serpent bit him.

“Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light,

and gloom with no brightness in it?”

IV. Summaries of the Minor Prophets

Hosea

Key Phrase: “God’s Loyal Love for Israel”

- Hosea lived in the northern kingdom, but addressed both kingdoms.
- He ministered from approximately 755 to 710 B.C. (Fall of the Northern Kingdom).
- God instructed Hosea to marry a woman who would bear him children, but then would be unfaithful to him and commit adultery with another man. God then used Hosea’s life as an illustration for His relationship with Israel & Judah.
- Primarily, Hosea’s ministry was about the great love that God had for His people, the forgiveness that God offered, and the coming judgment that would come if they didn’t turn back to Him.
- Hosea’s prophecies are quoted or referenced several times in the New Testament (Matt. 2:15; 21:33-44; Rom. 9:25-26; 1 Cor. 15:55; 1 Pet. 2:10), including Jesus’ statement to the Pharisees about mercy vs. sacrifice:

- Matthew 9:11-13 “And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ But when he heard it, he said, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice” [Hos. 6:6]. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Joel

Key Phrase: “The Day of the Lord”

- The date and details of Joel’s life are mysterious. Possibly he lived in the late 9th century B.C. during the reign of Joash.
- He lived during a time when there was a locust plague (1:2-14) and military advances by Tyre, Sidon and Philistia (3:4-8).
 - Joel is able to use these events to warn people of God’s wrath on “the Day of the Lord.” Again, this phrase is used to refer to any point in history when God is acting decisively and powerfully against sinners.
 - Illustration: Locust Plague of 1915 in Palestine.
- Peter quoted from Joel 2:28-39 in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21) to explain how God was pouring out His Spirit on those who believed in Jesus.

Amos

Key Phrase: “Judgement of Israel”

- Amos was a sheep breeder from Tekoa, a few miles south of Jerusalem. He was from the southern kingdom, Judah, but he mostly addressed the northern kingdom, Israel.
- Amos was one of the earliest of the writing prophets. He prophesied in the 8th century, during the reigns of Azariah/Uzziah and Jeroboam II. The Assyrian threat was looming on the horizon, but was not an immediate danger.
- Although he started his prophecy by declaring judgment against Israel’s neighbors (1:1-2:5), he spent most of his time bringing a message of judgment against Israel itself (2:6-5:27). He condemned Israel for oppressing the poor and sinning in other ways, and warned that God was going to enforce the consequences of covenant disloyalty (Lev. 26; Deut. 28).
- The Lord granted Amos five visions of future judgment (chs. 7-9), yet at the very end of the book, a promise of restoration is given (9:11-15).
- In the book of Acts, both Stephen (Acts 7:42-43) and James (Acts 15:16-17) quote from the book of Amos.

Obadiah

Key Phrase: "Judgment of Edom"

- Not much is known about the prophet Obadiah.
- Through him, Yahweh declared to Edom that judgment was coming. Apparently they had taken advantage of a recent military defeat that the Judeans suffered. Instead of offering aid to Judah, they plundered their territory. Consequently they would face God's judgment.
- The date of this event is not certain, but possibly it refers to the time after the fall of Judah when the Edomites moved into the southern end of Judah's territory.
- The geography and terrain of the land of Edom is referenced in Obadiah 3. Since they lived in a mountainous territory with steep cliffs serving as natural defenses, they had grown prideful.

Jonah

Key Phrase: "Revival in Nineveh"

- Jonah lived in Gath-hepher, near the place where Jesus would later spend much of his childhood (Nazareth). Jonah is also mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25 where he is described as God's servant and "the prophet who was from Gath-hepher."
- When God called him to go northeast to Nineveh, Jonah went southwest to Joppa where he boarded a ship for Spain.
- However, God humbled Jonah by sending a large fish to swallow him until he was ready to obey.
- His ministry in Nineveh was successful: the people repented, but Jonah was disappointed since he wanted God's judgment to be poured on the city of his enemies.
- God used this occasion to teach Jonah (and all believers of every age) that He cares deeply for sinners of all races.

Micah

Key Phrase: "Judgment & Restoration of Judah"

- Prophet from Moresheth in Judah.
- Micah prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (8th century B.C.). He started his ministry by addressing both Israel and Judah (Mic. 1:1, "Samaria and Jerusalem"), but lived through the fall of the Northern Kingdom so addressed only Judah after that.
- He brought a message of judgment to Israel & Judah, but like other prophets mingled hope with doom.
- Similar to other prophets, Micah confronted both the spiritual unfaithfulness and the social injustices that were taking place in his day.

- Micah's prophecies included the "Golden Rule" of the Old Testament:
 - Micah 6:8 "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Nahum

Key Phrase: "Judgment of Nineveh"

- The personal details of Nahum are not known. Based on the content of his book, it seems to have been written sometime in the middle of the 7th century B.C.
- His prophecy is against the capital city of Assyria: the city of Nineveh.
- The Assyrians are the ones who defeated Samaria and took the northern kingdom into exile in 722 B.C. Assyria and Nineveh were conquered by the Babylonians in 612 B.C.
- Although the ministry of Jonah had been successful in the first half of the 8th century, by the time of Nahum they had turned back to idols and violence.

Habakkuk

Key Phrase: "Faith"

- Similar to Nahum, we do not have any details of Habakkuk's personal life. He seems to have ministered around the end of the 7th century B.C., possibly after the death of the last godly king, Josiah.
- In his book, Habakkuk asked God a series of questions. First he asked why the Judeans were allowed to act so sinfully (1:2-4).
 - God's answer was that He was sending the Babylonians (i.e., Chaldeans) to execute His judgment (1:5-11).
- But Habakkuk's next question was how God could use a more sinful nation (Babylon) to punish a less sinful nation (Judah) (1:12-2:1).
 - God's response was that He would eventually punish Babylon as well (2:2-20).
- In the end, Habakkuk learned that he needed to trust God, to live by faith, and to worship Him for who He is. The book ends with a beautiful psalm of confidence, offered by a believer who had found peace in God's answers (3:1-19).
- In his letters to the Romans and the Galatians, Paul quoted Habakkuk 2:4, "The righteous shall live by faith," as he explained how salvation is by grace through faith (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11).

Zephaniah

Key Phrase: "Judgment & Restoration in the Day of the Lord"

- This is the only prophet we know of that came from the royal family: he was the great-great-grandson of Hezekiah (1:1).
 - “The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.”
- He prophesied early during the reign of Josiah, probably around 635-625 B.C.
- In his prophecies, he picked up the theme of the “Day of the Lord” that previous prophets had mentioned, describing it as “near,” “bitter,” and a time when God executed vengeance on His enemies (Zeph. 1:7, 8, 14).
- However, his book ends on a positive note, looking forward to a time when God would restore the nation and dwell with them once more (Zeph 3:9-20).

Haggai

Key Phrase: “Reconstruction of the Temple”

- Haggai ministered during the time of Zerubbabel, around 520 B.C.
- In this short book, he encourages the people to finish rebuilding the temple. The people were too busy building their own houses and were not honoring God by completing His house. Consequently God had punished them by preventing them from gathering in full harvests of their crops.
- In the second chapter, he delivers a message from the Lord to Zerubbabel, commending him for leading the people to work on the Temple and encouraging him that although their efforts did not look impressive, God was going to fill this Temple with glory.

Zechariah

Key Phrase: “Preparation for the Messiah”

- Zechariah, son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, also prophesied during the time of Zerubbabel and the reconstruction of the Temple, but his prophecies focus less on current issues and more on the future. He dated his prophecies (1:1, 7; 7:1), allowing us to date them to 520-518 B.C.
- While Zephaniah was from the royal family, Zechariah was from a priestly family (Neh. 12:16).
 - Nehemiah 12:12-16 “And in the days of Joiakim were priests, heads of fathers’ houses: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah; ... of Iddo, Zechariah ...”
- His prophecies are varied, ranging from the reliability of God’s Word, the Kingdom of God, God’s continual role in the life of the nation, and the coming of the Messiah:
 - “This book is the most messianic, apocalyptic, and eschatological in the OT. Primarily, it is a prophecy about Jesus Christ, focusing on His coming glory as a means to comfort Israel (cf. 1:13, 17). While the book is filled with visions, prophecies, signs, celestial visitors, and the voice of God, it is also practical, dealing with issues like repentance, divine care, salvation, and holy living. **Prophecy was soon to be silent for more than 400 years until John the**

Baptist, so God used Zechariah to bring a rich, abundant outburst of promise for the future to sustain the faithful remnant through those silent years."

--John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 1050.

Malachi

Key Phrase: "Appeal to Backsliders"

- Malachi prophesied during the time of Nehemiah, which makes him and Nehemiah the last two authors of the Old Testament.
- Malachi had two messages for the nation:
 1. They needed to stop sinning and live holy lives.
 2. The Lord would be sending a messenger to the people to prepare the way, and then the Lord Himself would be coming.

V. Messianic Elements within the Minor Prophets

There are various direct prophecies about the Messiah in the Minor Prophets, including the following:

Hosea predicted a Davidic king:

- Hosea 3:4-5 "For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days."

Joel predicted the Holy Spirit would be poured out, and Peter explained that Jesus did this after He ascended into heaven (Acts 2:16, 33):

- Joel 2:28-29 "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit."

Amos predicted that God will rebuild the "booth of David," poetically referring to the return of a Davidic king:

- Amos 9:11-12 "'In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name,' declares the LORD who does this."

Jonah's experience foreshadowed the Messiah. Jesus referred to his brief time in the tomb as "the sign of the prophet Jonah":

- Matthew 12:39-41 "But he answered them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.'" (Cf. Matt. 16:4; Luke 11:29-32.)

Micah predicted the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem:

- Micah 5:2 "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from old, from ancient days."

Zechariah predicted that the Messiah would ...

- come to Jerusalem riding on a donkey:
 - Zechariah 9:9 "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (See Matt. 21:4.)
- be abandoned by his followers:
 - Zechariah 13:7 "'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me,' declares the LORD of hosts. 'Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones.'" (See Mark 14:27.)
- be pierced:
 - Zechariah 12:10 "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn." (See John 19:37.)

Malachi predicted that a messenger, "Elijah," would come to prepare the way for the arrival of the Lord Himself.

- Malachi 3:1 "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts."
- Malachi 4:5-6 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."
 - The angel Gabriel described the ministry of John the Baptist using language similar to Malachi's prophecy (Luke 1:17), and Jesus said, "if you are willing to accept it, he [John the Baptist] is Elijah who is to come" (Matt. 11:14).

Concluding Thoughts

In these various ways and more, the Minor Prophets pointed **forward**, beyond the end of the Old Testament, to a kingdom and a King **greater** than any who had come before, who would be coming to deliver them ...

The Old Testament by itself is an unfinished story. It intentionally pointed the reader to the future: to the New Testament and the Messiah revealed in its pages. That's why the first page of the New Testament begins, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). Matthew picks up the story where Malachi left off.