

OVERVIEW OF THE MINOR PROPHETS

Designation:

Augustine apparently first coined the designation “minor prophets” in the fifth century A.D. to distinguish them from the “major prophets.” The term “minor” is not used to indicate the unimportance of these books, but merely refer to the relative brevity of the writings when compared to the writings of the Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc.). As Chisholm states, “Though much shorter than Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, these twelve prophetic books proclaim significant messages, the theological import of which is by no means minor.”¹

In the Hebrew Canon, the Minor Prophets are grouped together as one book designated simply “The Twelve.” This book is located as might be expected among the prophetic writings, more specifically the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve).² According to one Jewish tradition, the Minor Prophets are ordered chronologically.³ However, closer examination of internal evidence suggests that a strict chronological arrangement is debatable.

MAJOR PROPHETS		MINOR PROPHETS	
BOOK	CHAPTERS	BOOK	CHAPTERS
Isaiah	66	Hosea, Zechariah	14
Jeremiah	52	Amos	9
Ezekiel	48	Micah	7
Daniel	12	Jonah, Malachi	4
		Joel, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah	3
		Haggai	2
		Obadiah	1
TOTAL	178	TOTAL	67

Dating of the Minor Prophets:

The dating of the prophet’s ministries are closely linked to the dating of their respective books.⁴ Although it is theoretically possible that a significant period of time elapsed

¹ Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *Interpreting the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 9.

² The other group of prophets are designated the Former Prophets which consists of the Books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings.

³ Chisholm, *Interpreting the Minor Prophets*, 9.

⁴ Although theoretically it is possible that a significant period of time could elapse between a prophet’s ministry and the recording of that ministry this does not seem likely. Internal and external clues generally suggest that the books were written within the lifetime of the prophet or shortly thereafter.

between the prophet's ministry and the recording of that ministry this is unlikely. Internal and external clues generally suggest that the books were written within the lifetime of the prophet or shortly thereafter. Thus, "These books originated in different time periods over a span of roughly three hundred years."⁵ This period is often divided in relation to the Babylonian exile.

PROPHETIC TIME PERIODS		
Pre-exilic (ca. 930-586 B.C.)	Exilic (ca. 586-538 B.C.)	Post-exilic (ca. 538-430 B.C.)
Before the Babylonian exile	During the Babylonian exile	After the Babylonian exile
*Obadiah (840) *Joel (800's) Jonah (760) Amos (760-750) Isaiah (740-680) Hosea (755-710) Micah (735-700) Nahum (663-612) Jeremiah (627-580) Zephaniah (622) Habakkuk (607-605)	Daniel (605) Ezekiel (593)	Haggai (520) Zechariah (520) Malachi (430)
* Dating is much debated		

The Mission of the Minor Prophets:

In basic terms, the mission of the Minor Prophets was threefold: (1) to encourage disobedient people to *repent* from sin; (2) to encourage wayward people to *return* to God, and (3) to encourage the people to *remember* that God will ultimately triumph and God's people will ultimately be vindicated.

To fulfill this broad mission, the Minor Prophets used two basic methods: (1) the prophets preached or proclaimed the Word of God. (2) the prophets prophesied. Sometimes these two methods are popularly called foretelling and forth-telling.

The Content of the Prophecies:

Although there is some variety in the content of the prophecies of the Minor Prophets, most of the prophecies follow a basic fivefold pattern. (1) There is a warning of impending judgment because of sinfulness. These sins are often understood against a covenantal backdrop. (2) The prophetic warning is often followed by a identification and description of the sin(s). (3) Having identified the sin(s), the prophet then announces and describes coming judgment. (4) Impending judgment is often followed by a call for repentance. (5) The prophet then proclaims a promise of future deliverance and/or restoration.

⁵ Chisholm, *Minor Prophets*, 10.

PATTERNS IN THE PROPHETS⁶

- A. Many of the prophets are concerned with two events:
 - 1. The Assyrian invasions of 722–701 B.C. [Isaiah, Amos, Micah, Hosea]
 - 2. The Babylonian invasions of 605–586 B.C. [Jeremiah/Lamentations, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Habakkuk]

- B. Three of the prophets are concerned with post-exilic problems:
 - 1. The rebuilding of the temple in 520 B.C. [Haggai, Zechariah]
 - 2. The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in c.444 B.C. [Malachi]

- C. Two prophets (Daniel, Ezekiel) live during the Exile but also concern themselves with post-exilic events.

- D. Three prophets are “prophets to the nations” with themes that focus on other nations [Obadiah (Edom), Jonah (Nineveh), Nahum (Nineveh/Judah)]

- E. Two prophets (Joel, Obadiah) cannot be dated with certainty due to lack of specific references to kings or historical events.

- F. The prophets make great use of the Covenants made with God’s people.
 - 1. The Abrahamic Covenant promises are alluded to at least 16 times.
 - 2. The Mosaic Covenant’s blessings and curses are alluded to over 1100 times.
 - 3. The Mosaic Covenant’s restoration promises of Deuteronomy 30:1–10 are alluded to over 430 times.
 - 4. The Davidic Covenant concepts are alluded to at least 74 times. Often this is in the context of the failure of the kings of Judah.
 - 5. The Priestly Covenant’s promise of an eternal line of priests is developed in Jeremiah 33; Zechariah 3, 6; Malachi 2.

- G. There is a tendency for the prophets to start by pointing out corruption and predicting judgment, and then, to finish by reasserting the Davidic and Restoration promises.

- H. The “Golden Age” of the Future (millennial kingdom) is a composite of Primeval, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic ideals.

- I. Vengeance on Israel’s enemies (as promised in Gen 12:3 and Deut 30:7) is a major part of the prophet’s messages. There are about 43 chapters predicting this including: Isaiah 12-24, 46–47; Jeremiah 46–51; Ezekiel 25–32, 35, 38–39; Joel 3; Amos 1–2; Obadiah; Nahum 1–3; Habakkuk 2; Zephaniah 2; Zechariah 12, 14.

⁶ This is modified from Stephen Bramer, “Patterns in the Prophets” (unpublished class notes in BE104 Old Testament Prophets, Dallas Theological Seminary, Fall 2005.