

# Introduction to the Minor Prophets

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## INTRODUCTION

While 39 books constitute the Old Testament . . .

- 17 are called the Prophets
- 5 of the 17 are called Major Prophets because they constitute lengthier writings. They include:
  - Isaiah
  - Jeremiah
  - Lamentations
  - Ezekiel
  - Daniel
- The remaining 12 are called Minor Prophets because they are shorter in length. They include:
  - Hosea
  - Joel
  - Amos
  - Obadiah
  - Jonah
  - Micah
  - Nahum
  - Habakkuk
  - Zephaniah
  - Haggai
  - Zechariah
  - Malachi
- The Jews considered them to be one book and the Talmud says of them: “Our fathers made them one book, that they might not perish on account of their littleness.”

- The designation “Major Prophets” and “Minor Prophets” are assigned by man rather than by God. In fact, the Twelve were not called the "Minor Prophets" until the time of Augustine and Jerome when the Latin Church designated them as such because of their brevity.
- It is erroneous to conclude that the “major” prophets are of major importance and the “minor” prophets are of minor importance. The title of "minor" has nothing to do with their importance or content.
- God’s messages in the Minor Prophets are just as important as His messages in the Major prophets for His intended purpose and benefit for those to whom they were sent.

In 1986 bro. David Pharr published a book with a most Intriguing title: *Modern Messages from the Minor Prophets*. Influenced by both his title and book, I want to present a series of studies that I have entitled, ***Major Messages from the Minor Prophets***. While not all the messages contained in the last 12 books of the Old Testament will be included, a number of major ones will be presented.

## **BACKGROUND OF THE MINOR PROPHETS**

In studying the Minor Prophets, we are examining about 450 years of prophetic writings! The twelve books of Scripture known as the Minor Prophets (and referred to as *The Twelve* in the Hebrew, Septuagint, and Vulgate Bibles) span about four-and-a-half centuries and cover three significant periods of Israel's history:

1. **The Assyrian Period** – Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, and Nahum
2. **The Babylonian Period** – Habakkuk and Zephaniah
3. **The Persian Period** – Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

What nations were the concerns of the Minor Prophets?

1. **Israel** (Northern Kingdom Samaria, Ephraim) Hosea & Amos
2. **Judah** (Southern Kingdom) Joel, Micah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Zechariah & Malachi
3. **Nineveh** – Jonah & Nahum
4. **Edom** – Obadiah

It is well worth while to study these twelve prophets in their own historical contexts. We get to see who reigned over Israel and Judah, who were the contemporaries of these prophets (for instance, Elisha's ministry paralleled that of Obadiah and Joel), and what were the issues facing God's people during the days these men brought God's message.

It is interesting, therefore, to discover that the first division of the Minor Prophets is not arranged chronologically; that is, the prophets of the Assyrian Period are not in chronological order whereas the remaining five books are.

## **THE 12 MEN WHO BECAME THE MINOR PROPHETS**

Who are the men behind these 12 books? We know very little about some of these men of history. In some cases, all

we have is the book which bears their name. Some, like Jonah, are quite familiar. Others, like Obadiah, are quite obscure. Some had lengthy ministries and others—from what we know from their writings—may have been quite short. For example, the Book of Obadiah spans a period of some 4 months. Nonetheless, they are lesser known prophets from all walks of life.

- Joel is thought to have been a priest.
- Habakkuk appears to have been a priest.
- Micah seems to have been a simple villager.
- Amos was a shepherd. Amos 7:15
- Zephaniah was the great grandson of Hezekiah, the reformer king of Judah.

## WHY STUDY FROM THE MINOR PROPHETS?

Many of the reasons are the same ones we find for studying the Old Testament in general.

1. **Romans 15:4** – “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”
2. The Minor Prophets are part of God’s Inspired Word.
3. To gain a firmer foundation in the Old Testament preparations for the New Testament. Great truths are etched on the pages of these lesser known books and are validated on the pages of the New Testament.
  - a. In **Luke 11:29-30**, Jesus referred to the sign of Jonah. In so doing He validated the Book of Jonah while comparing His ministry with the ministry of

- Jonah. Although Nineveh repented, it didn't last more than 150 years before being overthrown by the Babylonians
- b. **Habakkuk 2:4** – “The just shall live by faith.” Not only incorporated in the preaching of the apostle Paul, but also was a truth which sparked the Reformation via Martin Luther.
  - c. When the wise men from the east came to Herod inquiring about the King of the Jews, Matthew 2:4-6, it was the book of the minor prophet Micah which provided the answer.
  - d. The minor prophet Hosea, in Hosea 11:1, when writing about the birth of Israel in the Exodus from Egypt, also prefigured the flight and return of the young Jesus from Herod's persecution as explained in **Matthew 2:15** – Out of Egypt I called My Son.”
  - e. The value of a slave, 30 pieces of silver, for which Judas would betray our Lord, was foretold by the minor prophet Zechariah in Zechariah 11:12.
  - f. It was the minor prophet Zechariah who pronounced the events we better know as the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Zechariah 9:6 foretold it.
  - g. Zechariah, in Zechariah 12:10, foretold of the Jews piercing/crucifixion of their own Messiah.
  - h. Another minor prophet, Malachi, revealed the ministry of John the Baptist (Malachi 3:1).
  - i. Joel foretold some identifying characteristics to help identify the birthday of the Lord's Church that would be pointed out by Peter in Acts 2:17-21

4. To learn from past fulfillment. George Santanya is known to have said, “Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” There are some uncanny, unsettling, and even hair-raising parallels between the situations and words found in the propjets and out own situation today. Although the United States of America is not Israel, many of the same principles apply and we can only blame ourselves when we find ourselves in the same well-worn ditch as cultures and countries who went before and also forsook God. C. Hassell Bullock in his book, *An introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*, writes on pages 8-10 of that work: “The deep satisfaction of studying the words of some of history’s most profound spokesmen is indescribable. But so is the deep anguish of the message they delivered to their ancient audience with its application for the modern world. Their call to righteousness, their summons to fasten social structures to the character of an ethical God, and their insistent proclamation that the Lord’s patience would not endure forever, even in the end sin could not outdo His grace or undo His love—these are emphatic precepts that the prophets iterated and reiterated to their world, precepts that still have not lost their relevance . . . The value of the Hebrew prophets has been assessed and weighed by three millennia of history, and thankfully they, being dead, yet speak.”
5. To observe characteristics of cultures in their death throws. Certainty of God’s judgment on those who, though previously favored, have abandoned Him and now rest in their pride.

6. How God has acted in the past is an excellent measure of how He is likely to behave in the future. We learn about the character of God. We can find solace and guidance for our own times of crisis. On further quote the C. Hassell book, this time from page 11, says: “The prophets spoke to Israel **in times of crises**. In fact, **historical** and **moral** crisis . . . Had there been no crisis, there would have been little need for the prophets. When the list of literary prophets is posted, it will be noted that they are clustered around critical events of eras.”

## **CONCLUSION:**

- A. This introduction to the Minor Prophets has been designed to help us prepare our minds to receive some of the great, major, and modern lessons we will examine over time. In this introduction we have endeavored to:
1. Acquaint our minds with some background of the Minor Prophets.
  2. Identify these prophets and the times in which they worked.
  3. Examine some six reasons for undertaking a study of lessons to be found in their writings.
- B. Major and modern lessons from the writings of the Minor Prophets are timely and can greatly enhance our walk with our God in an age this side of the cross.
- C. **God’s Plan for Man’s Salvation**