

# The Minor Prophets

The seventeen prophetic books comprise about one-fourth of Scripture and are crucial from a theological and historical point of view. Yet their message and meaning evade more people than any other section of the Bible, principally because of neglect. Many people are even more unfamiliar with the twelve minor prophets than they are with the five major prophets.

These twelve books became known as the Minor Prophets late in the 4th century a.d. not because they were considered less important or less inspired, but because they are generally shorter than the five Major Prophets, especially books like Isaiah and Jeremiah. Their messages are more succinct than those of the Major Prophets, but they are just as powerful.

Before the time of Christ these twelve books were joined together to make one scroll known collectively as "The Twelve." Their combined length (sixty-seven chapters) is about equal to that of Isaiah. The only chronological significance of the order of the Minor Prophets in the English Bible is that the first six were written before the last six.

The Minor Prophets from Obadiah to Malachi cover a four-hundred-year span of history moving through the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Empires. Three were prophets to the northern kingdom (Jonah, Amos, Hosea), six were prophets to the southern kingdom (Obadiah, Joel, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk), and three were postexilic prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi). Although all the minor prophets are named, very little is known about most of them.

**Hosea** - The unhappy story of Hosea and his faithless wife Gomer illustrates the loyal love of God and the spiritual adultery of Israel. Hosea exposes the sins of Israel and contrasts them to God's holiness. The nation must be judged for its sins but it will be restored in the future because of the love and faithfulness of God.

**Joel** - This book looks back to a recent locust plague that decimated the land of Judah to illustrate the far more terrifying day of the Lord. The land will be invaded by a fearsome army that will make the locusts seem mild in comparison. Nevertheless, God appeals to the people to repent in order to divert the coming disaster. Because the people will not change, judgment will come, but it will be followed by great blessing.

**Amos** - The northern kingdom was in its heyday when Amos warned the people of their coming doom. In eight pronouncements of judgment, Amos spirals around the surrounding countries before landing on Israel. He then delivers three sermons to list the sins of the house of Israel and call for repentance. The people reject Amos' warnings and their coming judgment is portrayed in a series of five visions. Amos closes his book with a brief word of future hope.

**Obadiah** - This obscure prophet of the southern kingdom directs his brief prophecy to the nation of Edom that bordered Judah on the southeast. Edom (descended from Esau) refused to act as his brother's keeper toward Judah (descended from Jacob). Because they gloated when Jerusalem was invaded, their judgment would be nothing less than total destruction.

**Jonah** - With a prophetic message of only one line, Jonah is the most biographical of all the prophets. The repentant response of the people of Nineveh to Jonah's blunt prophecy causes the God of mercy to spare the city. But the central teaching of the book is the lesson on compassion God must teach His reluctant prophet. Jonah learns to look beyond his nation and trust the Creator of all people.

**Micah** - The prophecy of Micah begins with a word of divine retribution against Israel and Judah because of the radical corruption on every level of society: rulers, prophets, priests, judges, businessmen, and landlords. But God's covenant promises will be fulfilled in the future kingdom of Messiah. Judgment will ultimately be followed by forgiveness and restoration, and the book ends on a strong note of promise.

**Nahum** - About 125 years after Nineveh repented under the preaching of Jonah, Micah predicted the imminent destruction of the same city. The people in the Assyrian capital have reverted to

idolatry and brutality, and Assyria has overthrown the northern kingdom of Israel. Because of God's holiness and power, Nineveh will surely be destroyed in spite of its apparent invincibility.

**Habakkuk** - Very close to the end of the kingdom of Judah, Habakkuk asks God why He is not dealing with the wickedness of his nation. When God tells him He is about to use the Babylonians as His rod of judgment, Habakkuk asks a second question: How can He judge Judah with a nation that is even more wicked? After the Lord's second response, the prophet magnifies the name of God for His power and purposes.

**Zephaniah** - In no uncertain terms, Zephaniah develops the theme of the coming day of the Lord as a day of awesome judgment followed by great blessing. Zephaniah begins with the coming judgment of Judah and broadens his scope to include the Gentiles as well. Because Judah refuses to seek the Lord, it stands condemned. But a Remnant will see triumph when God restores the fortunes of His people.

**Haggai** - After the Babylonian exile, the Jews began to rebuild the temple but allowed the work to stop while they rebuilt their own houses instead. Because of their failure to put God first, they were not enjoying His blessing in the land. Haggai urges the people to finish the temple because of God's promise that it would be filled with glory. After chastening the people for their contamination, Haggai closes with a promise of future blessing.

**Zechariah** - A contemporary of Haggai, Zechariah also exhorts the Jews to complete the construction of the temple. Zechariah's method of motivating them is one of encouragement. He reminds them that the temple is central to Israel's spiritual heritage, and it is related to the coming of Messiah. Zechariah's series of visions, messages, and burdens offer some of the clearest messianic prophecies in Scripture. God reveals that His program for his people is far from completed.

**Malachi** - By the time of the last Old Testament prophet, the spiritual and moral climate of the people has grown cold. Their worship is meaningless and indifferent, and as they grow more distant from God, they become characterized by religious and social compromise. A terrible day of judgment is coming when "all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff" to be burned, "But for you who fear My name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings."