

Historic Overview of the Minor Prophets¹

- I. The first Prophetic Books originated in the eighth century B.C.
 - A. These books came about during the decline of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and the rise of Assyria as a world power
 - B. Eventually Assyria destroyed Israel in 722 B.C., leaving only Judah as a remnant of David's kingdom
 - C. **Hosea**, **Amos**, and **Jonah** all ministered at mid-century (760–745 B.C.)
 1. Hosea and Amos decried social injustice fueled by the people's disobedience to the covenant and warned the covenant people and the nations of a future "day of the Lord," a day of judgment for their sins
 2. Jonah reluctantly preached to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, before Assyria became a dominant, oppressing nation
 - D. **Micah** ministered near the end of the century (700's B.C. [overlapping with Isaiah c. 745-690 B.C.])
 1. Micah rebuked Judah for personal and societal sins and (like Isaiah) predicting God's victory over Assyria during the Sennacherib crisis of 701 B.C. (see 2 Kings 18–19)
 2. Micah promised that a leader born in Bethlehem would defeat God's enemies (Micah 5:1–5; see Matt 2:1–12)
- II. Seventh-century B.C. prophets wrote against the background of the continuing power and ultimate demise of Assyria, which by 612 B.C. had lost its place as the world's greatest power to Babylon
 - A. The prophets pressed God's claims on the chosen people, especially the standards of the Mosaic covenant
 - B. **Zephaniah** (c. 640–609 B.C.) denounced Judah's worship of other gods, warned of judgment, and promised renewal beyond judgment
 - C. **Nahum** (c. 660–630 B.C.) announced the end of Assyria's tyranny
 - D. **Habakkuk** (c. 640–609 B.C.) contemplated the ways of God in the days leading up to Babylon's capturing of Judah
 - E. [Of course, Jeremiah also worked during this century and well into the next. He declared God's word of repentance to Judah for at least 40 years (627–587 B.C.; Jer. 1:1–3), decades that spanned from the period when Judah still had time to change its ways and avoid punishment, to the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon in 587 and the subsequent exiling of the people. He

¹Summarized from "The Prophets in Israel's History" in the "Introduction to the Prophetic Books" in the ESV Study Bible, pages 1229-1230.

repeatedly preached repentance, yet his most famous words are the promise of a future new covenant with the house of Israel (Jer. 31:31–34; see Heb. 8:8–12)]

- III. Sixth-century B.C. prophets lived under the shadow of exile. A few of them also lived during the shifting of world domination from Babylon to Persia, which occurred in 538 B.C.
- A. Daniel was taken to Babylon in 605 B.C. He worked there until at least 536 B.C.
 - B. Ezekiel joined the exiles in Babylon in 597 B.C., where he wrote accounts of visions he received during 593–571.
 - C. Both of these exiles envisioned perilous times and future days of glory for God’s people
 - D. **Obadiah** witnessed the terrors of Babylon’s invasion of Judah in 587 B.C.
 - E. **Haggai** and **Zechariah** were among the people allowed to return to Jerusalem from Persia in 520–516 B.C.
 - 1. They participated in the rebuilding of the temple
 - 2. They looked forward to future glory for God’s people under the Messiah’s leadership
 - F. **Malachi** served during the fifth century B.C.
 - 1. A contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah (c. 460–425 B.C.), he experienced the problems associated with rebuilding Jerusalem and restoring faithful worship and covenantal obedience
 - 2. Malachi identified flaws in the returned exiles’ commitment to God, such as insincere worship, the failure of the priests to teach God’s Word, and marital infidelity (Mal 1:6–2:16)
 - 3. He also predicted the coming of a new Elijah and the Messiah (Mal 4:5–6)
 - 4. According to the ESV Study Bible, the book of **Joel** possibility comes from this period as well
 - a. It makes no mention of a king in Judah
 - b. Joel calls the people to repentance at a time of national calamity (a locust plague)

Literary Styles of and Unifying Themes in the Prophetic Books²

- I. Many types of literature appear in the Prophetic Books
 - A. There are narratives detailing what the prophets did and the circumstances in which they received and delivered their messages
 - B. There are also sermons, extended poems, dialogues between God and prophets, and visionary experiences
 - C. All of these forms reveal the great themes found in the Prophetic Books

²Summarized from “Unifying Themes in the Prophetic Books” in the “Introduction to the Prophetic Books” in the ESV Study Bible, pages 1230-1231.

- II. Unifying Themes in the Prophetic Books
- A. The Prophetic Books include most of the Old Testament's greatest themes, preserving in written form (for future generations) the reasons Israel's history happened as it did
 - B. Though the authors wrote in different times and under different circumstances, their messages are in theological harmony with one another and with other types of biblical books
 - C. Several interrelated ideas unify the prophetic message, making it possible for readers to find their bearings in some difficult literature
 - 1. First, the prophets assert that God has spoken through them
 - a. The prophets declared God's instructions in two basic ways: word and symbol
 - b. Usually the prophets presented God's word orally; on occasion, they performed symbolic acts that demonstrated God's purposes (Hosea's marriage to unfaithful Gomer, which portrayed God's relationship with unfaithful Israel [Hosea 1-3])
 - 2. Second, the prophets affirm that God chose Israel for covenant relationship
 - a. The prophets addressed Israel as a people with special responsibilities based on this special relationship (Hosea 1-3; Amos 2:6-3:8; etc.)
 - b. Through the prophets, God revealed the success and failure of Israel's attempts or lack of attempts to fulfill their confession of faith in God and their God-given role as a kingdom of priests charged with serving the nations
 - 3. Third, sadly, the prophets most often report that the majority of Israel has sinned against their God and his standards for their relationship
 - a. They have failed to trust God; thus, they have broken the Ten Commandments (cf. Hos 4:2)
 - b. They have refused to repent (Amos 4:6-11)
 - c. In these times there was always a faithful minority, called the "remnant," as the prophets' ministries themselves demonstrate
 - 4. Fourth, the prophets warn that judgment will eradicate sin
 - a. This judgment is often called the "day of the Lord" (Joel 2:1-11; Zeph 1:7-18)
 - b. This is a day in history, as when Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylon (Jer 42:18), but it is also a day to come, when God will judge all the world's inhabitants (Isa 24:1-23)
 - c. The prophets recorded these warnings in writing so readers can do what the prophets' original audience usually failed to do – turn from sin to God
 - 5. Fifth, the prophets promise that renewal lies beyond the day of punishment that has occurred already in history and beyond the

coming day that will bring history as we know it to a close

- a. The coming of the Savior lies beyond the destruction of Israel and other such events. He will rule Israel and the nations, and he will bring peace and righteousness to the world (Isa 9:2-7; 11:1-16). This Savior must suffer, die, and rise from the dead (Isa 52:13-53:12). He will be “like a son of man,” and “the Ancient of Days” (God himself) will give him all the kingdoms of the world (Dan 7:9-14)
- b. He will be the catalyst for a new covenant with Israel that will include all those, Jew or Gentile, whom God’s Spirit fills and changes (Jer 31:31-40; Ezek 34:25-31; 36:22-32); this new people will serve him faithfully
- c. Eventually, he will cleanse the world of sin and recreate the earth (Isa 65:17-25; 66:18-24; Zeph 3:8-20); the creation, now spoiled by sin, will be whole again

Theme of Each Minor Prophet and the Foreshadowing of Christ³

- I. Hosea – the unfaithfulness of Israel calls for a permanent remedy, which will come in the faithfulness of Christ to the Father and the faithfulness that Christ then works through the Spirit in his people. God’s love for Israel foreshadows Christ’s love for the church (Eph 5:25-27)
 - A. God gives the prophecies during the time covered in 2 Kings 15-20 and 2 Chronicles 26-32
 - B. 4:10 False gods are not able to satisfy – their failure shows the folly of false worship and points by contrast to the one true God, and ultimately to his way of salvation in Christ (John 14:6)
 - C. 7:5 The king and princes participate in sin with the people, pointing to the need for a faithful king. Christ is the faithful king in the line of David
 - D. 8:13 God in his justice punishes. Since the people have broken his covenant, he reverses the deliverance from Egypt that was an aspect of covenantal redemption. A greater redemption is needed, which is to be found in Christ
 - E. 11:1 Israel, labeled God’s “son” in Ex 4:22 (see Deut 8:5), came out of Egypt in the exodus (Exodus 14). The movement of Israel prefigures the movement of Christ (Matt 2:15), who is the faithful Son (Matt 3:17), whereas Israel as son repeatedly failed (Hos 11:2)
 - F. 14:1 The command to repent anticipates the command to repent in the gospel
 - G. 14:5 The promise of blessing prefigures the blessings of salvation in Christ
- II. Joel – The day of the Lord, the day of God’s coming, brings judgment on sin but also may include blessing; both aspects are fulfilled in the first coming and the second coming of Christ

³Summarized from “History of Salvation in the Old Testament” in the ESV Study Bible, pages 2659-2661.

- A. 2:28 The climactic blessing is the pouring out of the Spirit, accomplished at Pentecost (Acts 2:16–21)
 - B. 3:13 At the second coming God executes judgment (Rev 14:14–20)
 - C. 3:17 The holiness of Jerusalem is perfected in the consummation (Rev 21:27)
- III. Amos – God comes to Israel with both judgment for sin and promises of restoration. The judgment and restoration anticipate the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, as well as the final judgment (Rev 20:11–15). The demand for righteousness is fulfilled in the righteousness of Christ (Rom 8:1–4)
- A. 1:1 God gives the prophecies during the time covered in 2 Kings 14:23–15:7
 - B. 1:3 Damascus, the capital of Syria, is judged, prefiguring final judgment on God’s enemies (Rev 20:11–15), displaying of God’s justice in judgment
 - C. 2:4 God does not overlook the sins of his own people, but calls them to account just as he did the other nations (1:3–2:3). He shows his impartiality (Rom 2:11–16). All are subject to curse for their disobedience, and escape is found only in Christ (Gal 3:13–14; Rom 3:9–31)
 - D. 3:2 Those with greater privileges are liable to greater punishment (Luke 12:48)
 - E. 3:10 The demand for righteousness is an integral part of God’s law
 - F. 4:6 Stubbornness, like the stubbornness of Pharaoh in the exodus, increases guilt
 - G. 7:3 The Lord in mercy does not simply destroy, but refines his people. His mercy anticipates the mercy to be manifested in Christ
 - H. 9:12 When Christ is raised, the nations (Gentiles) become included in God’s blessings, in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham
- IV. Obadiah – The judgment against Edom, a traditional enemy of Israel, contributes to the blessing of God’s people. The judgment and vindication prefigure the vindication of Christ and the judgments against his enemies, both in his first coming and in his second coming
- V. Jonah – Jonah’s rescue from death prefigures the resurrection of Christ (Matt 12:39–40), and the repentance of the Ninevites prefigures the repentance of Gentiles who respond to the gospel (Mat. 28:18–20; Luke 24:47)
- A. 3:10 The repentance of Gentiles contrasts with the repeated lack of repentance on the part of Israel
 - B. 4:11 God’s mercy is shown abundantly in the gospel and in the salvation of Gentiles who deserve nothing
- VI. Micah – God pronounces judgment on Israel, prefiguring final judgment and the judgment that fell on Christ; He promises blessing through the Messiah, anticipating the blessings of salvation in Christ (Eph 1:3–14)
- A. 5:2 The Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem
 - B. 6:2 Israel does not escape judgment for her sins. This judgment prefigures the justice and thoroughness of final judgment
 - C. 6:8 Sacrifices cannot replace the need for justice and kindness
- VII. Nahum – Judgment on Nineveh, a traditional enemy of God’s people, prefigures final judgment and final release from oppression

- A. 1:15 The good news of deliverance from the oppression of Nineveh prefigures the good news of eternal deliverance from sin and death in the gospel
 - B. 3:4 Nineveh's punishment prefigures the punishment for the idolatrous seduction of Babylon
- VIII. Habakkuk – God's use of a wicked nation to accomplish his righteousness foreshadows the use of wicked opponents to accomplish his purpose in the crucifixion of Christ
- A. 1:4 The perversion of justice in the triumph of the wicked prefigures the temporary triumph of the wicked in the crucifixion of Christ
 - B. 1:5 The unbelievability of God's use of a wicked people, the Chaldeans, prefigures the unbelievability of the way in which the injustice of the crucifixion of Christ is used by God for salvation
 - C. 2:4 The righteous person trusts in God; he believes that God's promises are true and that he will bring to pass his righteous purposes
- IX. Zephaniah – Judgments on evil people anticipate the final judgment and indicate the necessity of Christ's work and sin-bearing in order to save us from judgment
- A. 1:1 God gives the prophecies during the time covered in 2 Kings 22–23 and 2 Chronicles 34–35
 - B. 1:2 God in his holiness is zealous to eliminate all evil. His commitment anticipates the final judgment and renewal of the consummation
 - C. 2:3 The call for humility prefigures the gospel call to repent and turn to the Lord
- X. Haggai – The rebuilding of the temple prefigures the building of the church (1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:20–22) and the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:9–22:5)
- A. 1:1 God gives the prophecies during the time covered in Ezra 5–6
 - B. 1:2 The house of the Lord symbolizes his presence
 - C. 1:13 The promise to be with the people anticipates God being with his people in Christ
 - D. 2:4 Our work is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor 15:58; Phil. 2:12–13)
 - E. 2:6 God shakes the old order, showing that we should put our hope in his unshakable kingdom in Christ
- XI. Zechariah – The rebuilding in the time of the restoration from exile prefigures the eternal salvation that comes in Christ
- A. 1:1 God gives the prophecies during the time covered in Ezra 5–6
 - B. 3:8 The Branch is the Messiah
 - C. 9:9 Jesus the king comes to Jerusalem on a donkey (Matt 21:1–9)
 - D. 11:12 Thirty pieces of silver is the payoff connected with repudiating the Lord as true shepherd
 - E. 13:7 The disciples are scattered at the time when Christ the shepherd is crucified (Matt 26:31)
- XII. Malachi – Disobedience and compromise are eliminated with the coming of Christ and his purification
- A. 1:2 God's sovereign love for Jacob prefigures the sovereignty of his love for

the elect

- B. 2:8 The corruption of the covenant shows the need for a new covenant (Heb 8:8–13) and a perfect priest (Heb 7:11–8:6)
- C. 3:1 John the Baptist is the messenger preparing the way for Christ, who is the Lord, the messenger of the covenant (Matt 11:10–11)
- D. 4:6 John the Baptist prepares hearts for the coming of the Lord in the person of Christ (Luke 1:17)