

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

“The Early Prophets”

The Minor and Major Prophets are designations are not because of their importance as books, but because of their size as books. We are going to study them chronologically instead of by the Major and Minor designation.

The Minor Prophets are Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Joel, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Obadiah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. **The Major Prophets are** Isaiah, Jeremiah/Lamentations, Ezekiel and Daniel. The time span of these books stretches from 850 BC to 450 BC. During this time period both Israel and Judah were impacted by three kingdoms, Assyria, Babylon and Persia.

The following prophesied during the Divided (Assyrian) Kingdom period. Jonah, Amos and Hosea prophesied to the northern kingdom or Israel. Joel, Isaiah and Micah prophesied to the southern kingdom or Judah. **The following prophesied during the Babylonian Kingdom period.** The pre-exile prophets were Nahum, Zephaniah, Habbakuk, Obadiah and Jeremiah/Lamentations. The prophets of the exile were Ezekiel and Daniel. **The following prophesied during the Persian Kingdom period.** The post-exilic prophets were Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

1. ISRAEL’S EARLY PROPHETS (Jonah, Amos, Hosea)

Jonah: The Fleeing Prophet. The date of the book is approximately 760 BC.

The city of Ninevah was so large it took three days to go through it. Including suburbs it spread out for 20 miles in each direction. 120,000 people lived inside the city limits. Jonah’s mistake was that he forgot three truths...that God created everyone, raised Israel up to point the way to God and be a blessing to the nations and desires that everyone come to know him personally.

One of the questions raised in this book is “Does God change his mind?” Because he was going to destroy them and then relents. The answer is God doesn’t change his mind, but God’s character requires Him to relent from sending judgment when humans repent.

Jonah is the first missions book in the Bible addressing reaching those outside of Israel with the good news. The book ends with a question for all of us to ponder, because of our tendency to be like Jonah...”Do we feel compassion only for those who are like us? Or do we feel compassion for **ALL** people?”

Amos: The Prophesying Shepherd. Amos authored this book around 760-755 BC. He was a shepherd that took care of fig trees. Although he prophesied to Israel he was from Tekoa in Judah. What you need to know about him is that he was not formally educated. What that tells us is that God doesn’t need people to be professionally trained and educated with religious training to use them. **The name Amos means burden bearer.** He bore the burden of social injustice.

The main theme of this book is found in Amos 5:24 “Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never failing stream.” He called for social justice for the poor and a return to godly living. Amos declares 8 judgments. Seven are against their enemies and Judah. But the last and most severe is against Israel which shocks them. The three main reasons for judgment were...

- 1. Privilege Brings Responsibility.** They were God’s chosen people and that came with responsibility to live right.
- 2. The purpose of discipline is to lead to repentance.** God’s discipline is not punitive, it’s redemptive.
- 3. God is “with” those who seek good and against those who seek evil!**

The book ends on a positive with God reminding them of two things. **First**, His promise to David to restore Israel. **Second**, a future of agricultural bounty (9:12).

Hosea: The Prophet and the Prostitute. The name Hosea means “The Lord Saves.” The book is written between 715-710 BC. He emphasized three things. **First**, God’s love and desire to redeem Israel from sin. **Second**, His obligation to judge sin. **Third**, Israel state of spiritual adultery.

The book is an allegory of Israel’s relationship with God. Hosea saved her by taking her off the streets, saving or redeeming her and giving her everything. But she became unfaithful. The whole point of the book is that Israel has been unfaithful to God despite all He did for her.

Why did God ask Hosea to marry a prostitute? We don’t know however, we do have precedence. Often God asked the prophets to live out or illustrate his message to the people. For example, Jeremiah walking around wearing a wooden yoke on his neck (Jer. 27-28). Ezekiel erecting a model of the siege of Jerusalem and lying next to it on his side (Ezekiel 4-5).

But the amazing thing in this book, is that Hosea continues to love Gomer no matter what! In Hosea 11:8 he says, “How can I give you up?” This is how God feels about us.

2. JUDAH’S EARLY PROPHETS (Joel, Isaiah, Micah)

Joel: The Prophet of Pentecost. Joel means “The Lord is God.” Most scholars favor a date of 835 BC for this book. The theme of the book is “The Day of the Lord.” That day when judgment will fall and people will have to give account to God for how they lived. There are four reasons for Joel’s prophecies.

First, to explain to Judah why these calamities or judgments were being experienced (locusts, drought and famine).

Second, to warn of greater danger ahead (the army getting ready to march on them).

Third, to call the people to repent. Joel tells the people to rend their hearts not their garments.

Fourth, to declare a future “Day of the Lord” that would bring blessing and judgment.

The Apostle Peter points to Joel’s prophecy about the outpouring of the Spirit as being partially fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost in explaining what happened to the 120 in the Upper Room.

Isaiah: The Prophet of the Messiah. He likely wrote this book around 700 BC. Isaiah served in Judah’s Royal Court as a Prophet and was very educated. His name means “The Lord is Salvation.” So it’s not surprising that salvation is a recurring theme in the book. Most Christians today view prophecy as predicting the future. In reality most of OT prophecy is not foretelling but forthtelling, which means declaring things that already are and bringing them to the light.

The famous line is “Whom Shall I Send?” to which Isaiah’s replies, “Here am I, Send Me!”

The three purposes of Isaiah were **First**, to warn Judah and other nations that God was going to judge their sins. Isaiah prophesied that unless they repented the Babylonians would conquer Judah take their people into captivity. This happened a hundred years after his death in 586 BC. **Second**, to prophecy that a remnant of Jews would return to the land after the captivity. This happened 150 years after his death. **Third**, to prophesy that God was sending a Messiah to be the Savior of all nations.

The book of Isaiah is a mixture of judgment, deliverance, salvation and hope. And it ends as the other books by offering hope and deliverance to Judah if she repents.

Micah: The Prophet of Judgment and Mercy. Micah ministered sometime between 750 and 686 BC. He ministered at the same time as Isaiah and Hosea. Like Amos, Micah was a country prophet from a town called Gath.

There are 3 themes in this book. **The first is Social Justice.** He cried out against the social evils of his day such as corruption, greed and immorality.

The second is what Constitutes True Worship. He speaks against the mixture of the pure with the false that Judah was engaged in. There was a lot of corruption in the priesthood at this time. The shepherds were leading the people astray.

The third is a False Sense of Security. They are on the precipice of destruction and are totally unaware of it. They think they're invincible. Their trust is in the wrong things (Wealth, Possessions, Alliances).

Like Hosea, it uses courtroom imagery of God making a case against Israel. He also makes a pun or play on words out of the name of each town as he describes the effects the disaster will have on it. Look at Micah 1:10-15. Gath sounds like the word for "Tell." So it reads don't tell our enemies in tell. Beth-leaphrah means "house of dust." "You people in the house of dust will roll in the dust." Zaanah means "come out." "You people of come out dare not come out." You get the idea.

A key verse from Micah is Micah 6:8 "He has shown you O man what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God." That means we should be humble, loving and treat everyone with great respect and fairness. That was not happening. The culture of Judah was filled with corruption, greed, prejudice and injustice. The sad thing is that much of it came from the leaders and priests.

Chapter 7 concludes the book with a message of hope, compassion and restoration for Israel.