

Introduction to The Twelve Minor Prophets

Dr. Ian A. Fair

2025

Preface

The twelve minor prophets prophesied during the Persian period of Israel's exilic era. The prophets call Israel during their captivity and exile to repent and stay faithful to God, or face imminent judgment.

Through the prophets a loving and just God promises, in prophetic and apocalyptic genres, to bring about a *future eschatological age* that will be introduced by a *messianic servant king*.

The *Twelve Minor Prophets* are presented in the Hebrew Bible, the *Tanakh*, in a different grouping or order than that found in Christian Bibles.

Introduction to the Twelve Minor Prophets

The Twelve Minor Prophets are a collection of twelve prophetic works traditionally considered the prophecies of twelve prophets functioning during the post-Babylonian Persian era of Israel's history, ca. 538 BCE.

The Twelve present their prophesies in a mixed literary form combining both *historical prophecies* with *apocalyptic eschatological* pronouncements.

In the Hebrew Old Testament, the *Tanakh*, *The Twelve* are listed as a single book among the *Nevi'im*, the books of prophecy, the second major collection of the Hebrew *Tanakh*.

In the broad Christian Bibles *The Twelve* are listed as twelve individual books of minor prophets in the following order, *Hosea*, *Joel*, *Amos*, *Obediah*, *Jonah*, *Micah*, *Nahum*, *Habakkuk*, *Zephaniah*, *Haggai*, *Zechariah*, and *Malachi*. Their order and position varies in the Protestant, Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox Bibles.

The name "Minor Prophets" goes back to Augustine of Hippo, ca. 400 CE, who called the twelve shorter prophetic books *prophetiae minores*, *minor prophecies*, distinguishing them from the *four longer books* of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

The Dates and Contexts of the Twelve

Scholars debate the dates and eras of the Twelve, spreading the dates of Israel's tumultuous closing prophetic religious history among the 8th century BCE prophets, *Hosea*, *Amos*, *Micah*, the 7th century BCE prophets, *Nahum*, *Habakkuk*, and *Zephaniah*, to the 6th and 5th century BCE prophets, *Haggai*, *Zechariah*, *Malachi*.

Each of the Twelve must be interpreted withing its unique Jewish *religious*, *political*, and *genre* historical and literary context.

The Historical and Religious Context of the Twelve

Recent research of the Persian era and its impact on Israel and Judah has introduced a dynamic debate over the early dating of the Minor Prophets suggesting that the Twelve were edited and refined during this era resulting in later dates. This debate does no overly impact the messages couched within the prophets.

The Eighth Century Minor Prophets

Hosea- 8th century BCE. Before the Fall of Israel to Assyria. Religious apostasy.

Overlapped with *Isaiah*, *Amos*, and *Micah*.

Joel – uncertain date. Associated with Jerusalem.

Warning sign of locusts as a call for repentance and future judgment on Israel.

The eschatological kingdom prophesied, cf. Acts 2:17.

Amos – 8th century BCE, before the fall of Israel to Assyria. Warnings against social injustice, greed, and idolatry.

Obediah – uncertain, 8th or 9th century BCE. Before the Fall of Israel to Assyria. Messages of doom and destruction on Israel, Edom, and the nations. Hope for deliverance for Israel in a future divine kingdom.

Jonah – 8th century BCE. Jonah and Ninevah, a neo-Assyrian Empire. The book depicts God's universal concern for the nations.

Micah – 8th century BCE. Before the Fall of Israel and Judah, judgment on Assyria. A message of moral, cultural, and religiousness, especially in business deals with the nations

The Seventh Century Minor Prophets

Nahum – 7th century before the Fall of Judah, the Southern Kingdom. Contemporary of Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. Judgment pronounced on Ninevah, ca. 612 BCE!

Habakkuk – 7th century BCE. Southern Kingdom, Jerusalem. Discussion with God! Why are the ruling class in Jerusalem and Judah permitted to abuse the poor. Wickedness and injustice condemned.

Zephaniah – 7th century BCE. The last minor prophet before the Assyrian captivity, 701 BCE. Assyria defeated by Babylon 612 BCE. Jerusalem destroyed by Babylon 586 BCE. Zephaniah was a contemporary if Nahum.

The Sixth Century Minor Prophets

Haggai – Post Exilic return to Jerusalem and Temple. Return led by Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. The foundation of the Temple is laid. Some resistance but under preaching of Haggai and Zechariah is resumed The Temple was completed ca. 516 BCE. Holiness verses moral uncleanness stressed.

Zechariah - Post Exilic return to Jerusalem and Temple. Ca. 520 BCE. Significantly apocalyptic in genre. The people are urged to repent or be judged. A promising eschatological future awaits this who have faith and follow righteousness.

Malachi – Post Exilic return to Jerusalem and Temple. Comes after Haggai and Zechariah but before Nehemiah. The last prophetic book written of the canonical Old Testament, ca. 430 BCE. In the form of a dialogue of questions and answers regarding the future. Condemns corrupt sacrifices, divorce, and mixed marriages. Apostasy and sin condemned, but assures Israel of a future eschatological messianic blessing for believing penitents.