

*The Old Testament Minor Prophets*  
An Overview

Welcome to the study of the Minor Prophets! We are excited that you will be studying with us this year. As we delve into the treasures of these intensely powerful messages, LORD, use them to *penetrate* and *purify* our hearts—enriching our lives for time and eternity!

*The eighth century B.C. witnessed the rise of one of the most potent moral forces the world has ever known—the writing prophets.* Twelve of these prophets (known as the Minor Prophets) form the last twelve books of the Old Testament. Most of us would agree that these rather obscure prophetic books are among the least read and understood books of the Bible. Yet they have startling relevance for Christians today. Using words that cut to the heart, the prophets awaken us and invite us to open our eyes and be astounded at what God is doing in the world.

As we lay open these pages we will be stirred by the sounds of war, the measured tramp of marching feet; we will see great empires rise and fall, find ourselves in towns, villages and world capitals—hear the wrathful voice of the king, the wail of the widow and the disparaging cry of the captive. Above all the rest we will hear the voice of the living God and the urgent voice of the prophet warning us and wooing us with the enduring promises of God. Exploring the Minor Prophets should not be a dull experience!

The twelve Minor Prophets can be divided into three groups:

**Prophets to Israel** (the Northern Kingdom) – *Amos, Hosea and (Jonah sent to Nineveh)*

**Prophets to Judah** (the Southern Kingdom) – *Obadiah, Joel, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah and Habakkuk*

**Post-Exilic Prophets** (Prophets of the returned remnant) – *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*

Since time will not allow for an in-depth study of all twelve books, prophets from each group have been selected in order that we might gain a broad perspective of the entire prophetic era. From the Northern Kingdom we will study *Amos*; from the Southern Kingdom *Joel, Nahum* and *Habakkuk*; and from the Post-Exile period the prophet *Haggai*. During the course of the year the remaining Minor Prophets can be read at your leisure. Taken together, the twelve Minor Prophets offer a panoramic view of Israel's religious life during one of the most critical periods in the Israelites' history. Our hope is that you will come away with a new appreciation for these fearless men of God, along with many valuable applications for your life.

The prophets came from all regions of the country and from all walks of life. Sharing an overwhelming conviction that God had called them—the prophets poured their souls into their pleas and often risked their lives to confront wicked rulers with the truth. Sometimes they were *foretellers*, inspired to lift the dense veil of the future and give glimpses of things to come. Always they were *forth-tellers* who denounced sins, demanded repentance and declared God's purposes for mankind. *Through them God confronts us with the holiness of His character, the breadth of His perspective and love, and the quality of life He desires for His people.*

**How did His people respond? How will we respond? That is what this study is about!**

**Open Your Heart:** Before you open God’s Word, open your heart and mind to God in prayer. “As we study, O God, fashion us in our inmost being to be more like You—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You have many things to teach us through these great men of God. May we be good *listeners* and good *learners*.”

1. What has been your exposure to the Minor Prophets prior to this study? Write your response and/or comments below.

To understand the prophets we must first understand the unique relationship God had with Israel. This tiny nation was formed by God and brought into a special covenant relationship with Him for the purpose of being His witness—His representative of the one true God in the midst of a world of idolatry. Sadly, Israel failed to live up to her divine calling. God responded by sending the writing prophets who confronted the spiritual apostasies and moral depravity of their times.

### **Historical Background**

*Take time to read the handout, “The Old Testament at a Glance.” This will allow you to quickly trace the flow of biblical history through the Old Testament.*

We pick up the narrative at the close of Samuel’s judgeship (1,000 B.C.). For some time Israel had willfully insisted upon having human kings rule over them in spite of God’s solemn protest and warning of the consequences of such a step. God gave them what they demanded. The twelve tribes of Israel were united as a monarchy under the rule of kings Saul, David, and Solomon. Under Solomon’s reign Israel reached the height of its power. But as the years passed, Solomon acquired great wealth. He also acquired more and more wives and allowed his foreign wives to worship their false gods. Solomon offered sacrifices to these false gods himself. When Solomon died his son could not hold the kingdom together and the 10 northern tribes split off to form the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the tribes of Judah and Benjamin retained Jerusalem as the capital of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. This was one of the great “turning points” in the history of Israel. *The message of the Minor Prophets, therefore, belongs to the period of decline and fall of the Hebrew nation.*

Many of the kings from both Israel and Judah were wicked men who led multitudes of people into idolatry and all sorts of disobedience to God. The northern kingdom’s disobedience to the covenant (1 Kings 12:25-33) far outweighed anything yet seen in Judah; thus, Israel was slated for destruction by God because of her flagrant disobedience. The people of Judah witnessed the annihilation of the northern kingdom of Israel, and were warned that they were not immune to God’s wrath and were, in fact, on the same road to destruction. Judah, too, was chastised for her waywardness and carried off into exile. Once the captivity of Judah was completed the remnant of Judah re-gathered and returned to their homeland (2 Chronicles 36:20-23). This momentous development also called for prophets as some of the Jews grew discouraged and neglectful.

Unless we know these events and others within this 500-600 year period, we probably will not be able to follow what the prophets are saying. Each prophetic message was delivered in a specific historical setting which contributes to a reader’s ability to comprehend their message.

## Timeline/Map 1

The accompanying Timeline presents the approximate chronological relationship of the writing prophets. The prophetic era began in the eighth century B.C. and continued to the end of the Old Testament Scriptures. Review the Timeline carefully and keep this resource handy as you study. Map 1 gives you a visual picture of the various empires that were vying for power during those 500 to 600 years. The Minor Prophets span the entire prophetic era from the early Assyrian period to the early Persian period. Prophets from each period are listed at the bottom of Map 1.

## Getting Started

Let's begin by taking a brief tour of the five Minor Prophets we will be studying this year: **Amos, Joel, Nahum, Habakkuk** and **Haggai**. The fact that they are called Minor Prophets only has to do with the length of their prophecy, not with the importance of their message.

2. Page through each of these books in the order listed below. The purpose of this tour is to get a broad view of what God was doing through the ministry of each prophet. *When taken together we can gain a much larger perspective of God's dealings with His chosen people as well as the surrounding nations during the prophetic era.*

For now, try to discern what each book is about. Observe chapter titles, headings, main themes and divisions within in each book. Notice the often repeated words and phrases. Pray that God will give you insights into His truth as you examine these important messages. After completing your tour of each Minor Prophet take time to record your observations and first impressions in the space below.

AMOS

JOEL

NAHUM

HABAKKUK

HAGGAI

3.
  - a. As you explored each of these prophetic books what did you observe about the prophets' emotions and their attitude towards God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. Share one example of how a prophet's response to God spoke to you personally.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. There is a general pattern to many of the prophetic writings. Glance at the first and last chapters of Amos, Joel and Zephaniah for example, and record any insights that come to mind.

Our whirlwind tour of the Minor Prophets has given us a tiny glimpse of some of Scripture's most searching truths. One of your assignments this year will be to occasionally pause and reflect on the **points** below. *Your insights will be shared at the end of the series in the review lesson.*

### **Points to Ponder**

- The overall significance of the Old Testament prophets in human history
- What this period of history reveals about God
- What this period reveals about human nature
- Your personal response to God's prophetic activity

The Minor Prophets offer a revealing look into the character, the nature and the heart of God. God longs to draw us near to Himself so that you and I can participate in the life within the circle of the Trinity.

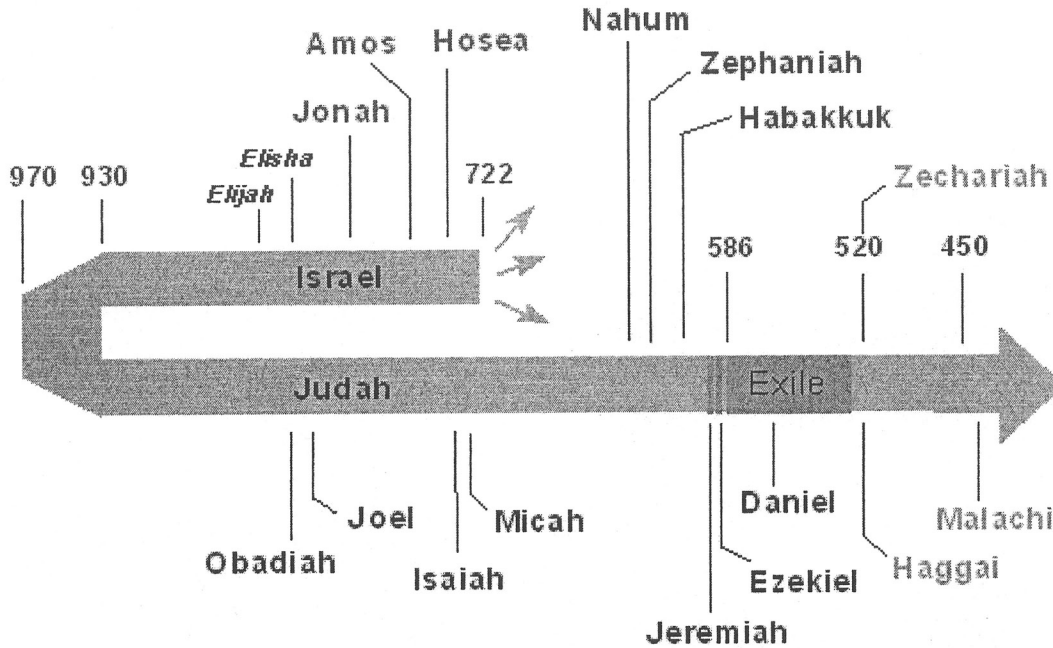
5. As you listened to God's voice during the introductory study, what new insight/insights were you given about the nature of God and His ways that you would like to explore further? How might these insights further enhance your intimacy with the God who invites us into His inner circle?

**For Your Own Comfort:** Meditate on the closing words of Micah's prophecy.

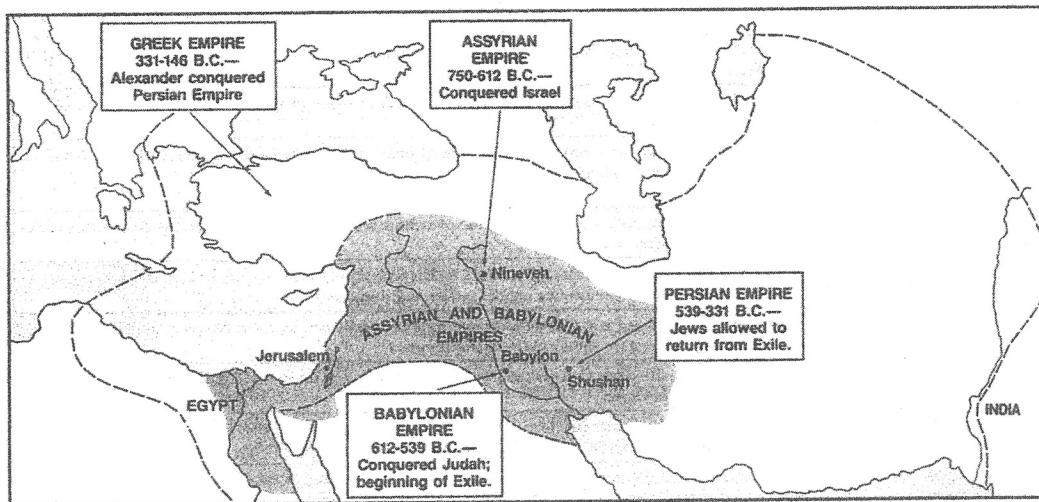
*Who is a God like You,  
who pardons sin and forgives the transgression  
of the remnant of His inheritance?  
You do not stay angry forever  
but delight to show mercy.  
You will again have compassion on us;  
You will tread our sins underfoot  
and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.  
You will be true to Jacob, and show mercy to Abraham,  
as You pledged on oath to our fathers  
in days long ago.*

*Micah 7:18-20 NIV*

## Timeline of the Writing Prophets



MAP 1



**Prophets of the Assyrian Period**—Jonah, Joel, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum

**Prophets of the Babylonian Period**—Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Ezekiel, Obadiah, Daniel

**Prophets of the Persian Period**—Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

# The Old Testament at a Glance

The creation of human life; Adam & Eve <b>Genesis 2:5-25</b>	Sin entered the world through the disobedience of one man <b>Genesis 3</b> <b>Romans 5:12</b>	God judged the world through Noah and the flood <b>Genesis 6</b>	The Tower of Babel; God confused the languages of the whole earth, creating nationalities <b>Genesis 11:1-9</b>	Abraham became the Father of God's chosen nation "Israel" from whom Christ our Savior came <b>Genesis 12:1-3</b> <b>Genesis 17:1-8</b>	The nation of Israel multiplied: Isaac, Jacob - Esau and *Joseph - see below <b>Genesis 18-50</b>
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During the next generation the Israelites became slaves of the Egyptians and served them for 400 years <b>Exodus 1:1-14</b> <b>Foretold in Genesis 15:13</b>	Moses led the exodus from Egypt, but Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness due to their disobedience <b>Exodus 5 - 40</b> <b>Leviticus</b> <b>Numbers</b> <b>Deuteronomy</b>	Joshua led God's chosen people into the Promised Land <b>Book of Joshua</b>	Israel's sin led to the period of the Judges <b>Book of Judges</b>	Israel's demand for an earthly king resulted in the Monarchy: Saul, David and Solomon <b>I Samuel 8:1 - II Samuel 24:25</b> <b>I Kings 1:1 - 11:43</b> <b>I Chronicles 10:1 - 29:30</b> <b>II Chronicles 1:1 - 9:31</b>
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The kingdom is split assunder North - Israel - 10 tribes South - Judah - 2 tribes <b>I Kings 12:1-24</b> <b>II Chronicles 10:1 - 11:4</b>	The collapse and annihilation of the Northern Kingdom <b>II Kings 17:1-41</b>	The collapse of the Southern Kingdom; Exiled to Babylon <b>II Kings 23:25-27</b> <b>II Kings 24:18 - 25: 21</b> <b>II Chronicles 36:15-21</b>	70 years later a remnant of the Southern Kingdom returns to their homeland <b>II Chronicles 36:22-23</b> <b>Ezra 1-2</b> <b>Nehemiah 2:1-9</b>	The remnant rebuilds the city of Jerusalem, the temple, and the wall around the city <b>Ezra 3:1 - 6:22</b> <b>Nehemiah 2:1 - 6:19</b> <b>The Remnant Repents! Ezra 10</b>
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## The prophetic era began at the time of the divided Kingdom and continued to the end of the Old Testament.

\* Joseph was sold by his brothers as a slave to an Egyptian official. Through a series of astonishing events, Pharaoh appointed Joseph prime minister of Egypt, and gave him command over the entire kingdom, subject only to Pharaoh himself. During a famine, Joseph's family came to Egypt to buy grain. At the close of Genesis, Joseph's whole family (the entire nation of Israel at that time) resided in Egypt.