

Introduction to the Minor Prophets:

1. Divisions of The Old Testament Prophetic Books:

The first division of the Old Testament is known as the Law with the second being called the Historical Books. The Historical Books included six books—Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, and 1 & 2 Kings which are also called by some the Former Prophets. Although these books deal with the history of Israel, they contain some prophetic comments.

The seventeen books considered in this section are classified in the Hebrew Bible as the Latter Prophets. The term 'latter' speaks primarily of their place in the canon rather than of their chronological position. These prophets are sometimes called *the writing prophets* because their authors wrote or recorded their utterances. There were other *oral prophets* like Nathan, Ahijah, Iddo, Jehu, Elijah, Elisha, Oded, Shemaiah, Azariah, Hanani, Jahaziel, and Huldah who left no records of their utterances.

Mostly because of their size, the Latter Prophets are subdivided into the Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel), and the twelve Minor Prophets, whose writings could all be included in one large scroll which came to be known in Greek as the *DODECAPROPHETON*, ("the Twelve-Prophet Book"). Daniel, usually viewed as one of the Major Prophets in the English Bible, actually appears in the third division of the Hebrew Canon called "the Writings."

Lamentations will also be considered because of its place in the English Bible, though in the Hebrew Bible it is among the five rolls or *MEGILLOTH*, the shorter books, which were brief enough to be read publicly on anniversaries.

2. Descriptions of The Prophets:

The authors of these books were described or referred to by a number of terms due to the nature of their ministry and calling. They were called prophets, seers, watchmen, men of God, messengers, and servants of the Lord.

The word prophet is from the Hebrew word *NABHI*. The derivation of this word is a matter of controversy, but the essential idea in the word is that of an authorized spokesman. It is used of one person speaking for another (Exodus 6:28-7:2), of a true prophet who speaks for God (Numbers 12:1-8), and of an office (Deuteronomy 18:9-22). The Greek word used to translate *NABHI* is

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PROPHET8S, which is derived from the verb PROPH8MI, which means to “enlighten beforehand.”

C. Directives of The Prophets.

As a mouthpiece or spokesman for God, the prophet’s primary duty was to speak forth God’s message to God’s people in the historical context of what was happening among God’s people. This is rightfully called **forthtelling** with a narrower meaning of **foretelling**. In the process of proclaiming God’s message, the prophet would frequently reveal that which pertained to the future. **Forthtelling** involved **insight** into the will of God; it was designed to **exhort**, challenging men to obey. On the other hand, **foretelling** entailed **foresight** into the plan of God and was **predictive**, either encouraging the righteous in view of God’s promises or warning in view of coming judgment. So the prophet was the divinely chosen spokesman who, having received God’s message, proclaimed it in oral, visual, or written form to the people. For this reason, a common formula used by the prophets was, “Thus says the Lord.”

As God’s spokesman, their message can be seen in a three-fold function they had among the people of God in the Old Testament:

1. **They functioned as preachers** who expounded and interpreted the Mosaic law to the nation. It was their duty to admonish, reprove, denounce sin, threaten with the terrors of judgment, call to repentance, and bring consolation and pardon. Their activity of rebuking sin and calling for repentance consumed far more of the prophets’ time than any other feature of their work. The rebuke was driven home with predictions about the punishment that God intended to send on those failing to heed the prophet’s warning (cf. Jonah 3:4).
2. **They functioned as predictors** who announced coming judgment, deliverance, and events relating to the Messiah and His kingdom. Predicting the future was never intended merely to satisfy man’s curiosity, but was designed to demonstrate that God knows and controls the future, and to give purposeful revelation. The prediction given by a true prophet would be visibly fulfilled. The failure of the prediction to be fulfilled would indicate that the prophet had not spoken the word of *Yahweh* (cf. Deut 18:20-22). In 1 Samuel 3:19 it is said of Samuel that the Lord was with him and let none of his prophetic words fail (lit., “fall to the ground”).
3. **They functioned as watchmen** over the people of Israel (Ezek 3:17). Ezekiel stood as a watchman on the walls of Zion ready to trumpet a warning against religious apostasy. God warned the people against political and military alliances with foreign powers, the temptation to become involved in idolatry and Canaanite cultic worship, and the danger of placing excessive confidence in religious formalism and sacrificial ritual.

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While the prophets functioned in various ways as they communicated God's message, **they occupied one major role** in Israel's religious system. The prophets in Israel occupied the role of a **royal diplomat** or **prosecuting attorney**, indicting the nation for violations of the Mosaic covenant.

D. Dates of The Prophets:

1.	Jonah	850-780
2.	Obadiah	840
3.	Joel	835-796
4.	Amos	765-750
5.	Hosea	755-715
6.	Micah	740-690
7.	Isaiah	740-680
8.	Nahum	630-612
9.	Jeremiah	627-585
10.	Zephaniah	625
11.	Habakkuk	606-604
12.	Daniel	605-536
13.	Ezekiel	592-570
14.	Lamentations	586
15.	Haggai	520
16.	Zechariah	515
17.	Malachi	430

E. Dates of The Kings of Israel:

1.	Jereboam I.	930-909
2.	Nadab.	909-908
3.	Baasha	908-886
4.	Elah	886-885
5.	Zimri	885
6.	Tibni	885-880
7.	Omri	885-874
8.	Ahab	874-853
9.	Ahaziah	853-852
10.	Joram	852-841
11.	Jehu	841-814
12.	Jehoahaz	814-798
13.	Jehoash	798-782
14.	Jeroboam II	793-753
15.	Zachariah	753
16.	Shallum	752
17.	Menahem	752-742
18.	Pekah	752-732
19.	Pekahiah	742-740

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20. Hoshea 732-723

F. Dates of The Kings of Judah

1.	Rehoboam.	930-913
2.	Abijam.	913-910
3.	Asa.	910-869
4.	Jehoshaphat.	872-848
5.	Jehoram.	853-841
6.	Ahaziah.	841
7.	Athaliah.	841-835
8.	Joash.	835-796
9.	Amaziah.	796-767
10.	Azariah (Uzziah).	792-740
11.	Jotham.	750-735
12.	Ahaz.	735-715
13.	Hezekiah.	715-686
14.	Manasseh.	697-642
15.	Amon.	642-640
16.	Josiah.	640-609
17.	Jehoahaz.	609
18.	Jehoiakim.	609-598
19.	Jehoiachin.	598-597
20.	Zedekiah.	597-586

G. Descriptions of Jesus Christ.

1. Jonah (Fleeing From God's Will): Through Jonah, Christ is portrayed in His resurrection (Cf Matt 12:40), seen as a prophet to the nations (though obviously not reluctantly like Jonah), and as the Savior of the nations. In Jonah's life, He is seen as the Savior and Lord (2:9). **(4 Chapters)**

2. Obadiah (Poetic Justice): Christ is seen in Obadiah as the judge of the nations (15-16), the Savior of Israel (17-20), and the Possessor of the kingdom (21). **(1 Chapter)**

3. Joel (The Coming of The Day of Yahweh): In Joel, Christ is presented as the one who will give the Holy Spirit (cf. 2:28 with John 16:7-15; Acts 1:8), who judges the nations (3:2, 12), and who is the refuge and stronghold of Israel (3:16). **(3 Chapters)**

4. Amos (Judgment For Abused Privilege): Amos presents Christ as the One who will rebuild David's dynasty (9:11) and as the one who will restore His people (9:11-15). **(9 Chapters)**

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5. Hosea (Persevering Love): In Hosea, Messiah is presented as the Son of God (cf. 11:1 with Matt. 2:15), as the only Savior of His people (cf. 13:4 with John 14:6), as the one who will ransom us from the dead (cf. 13:14 with 1 Cor. 15:55), as the one who loves us with great compassion (11:4), and as the one who heals those who will return to Him (6:1). **(14 Chapters)**

6. Micah (Who Is Like God?): Micah presents Christ as the God of Jacob (4:2), the Judge of the nations (4:3), and the Ruler who would be born in the city of Bethlehem (cf. 5:2 with Matt. 2:1-6). The priests and scribes quoted Micah 5:2 in answer to Herod's question about the birthplace of Messiah. **(7 Chapters)**

7. Isaiah (The Salvation of Yahweh): No book of the Old Testament presents a portrait of Christ that is as complete and comprehensive as does Isaiah. Isaiah portrays Messiah in His sovereignty above (6:1f), birth and humanity (7:14; 9:6; 11: 1), in His ministry by the Spirit (11:2f), His divine nature (7:14; 9:6); His Davidic descent (11:1); His work of redemption as our substitute (53), His ministry as the Servant Savior (49ff), and much more. **(66 Chapters)**

8. Nahum (The Doom of Ninevah): While there are no direct Messianic prophecies in Nahum, in keeping with the basic Christological spirit of all prophecy, Nahum sees Christ as the jealous God and avenger of His adversaries (1:2f). **(3 Chapters)**

9. Jeremiah (Warnings Against Sin and Judgment): Many pictures of Christ are seen in Jeremiah: He is portrayed as the fountain of living waters (2:13; cf. John 4:14), the balm of Gilead (8:22), the Good Shepherd (23:4), a Righteous Branch (23:5), and the Lord our Righteousness (23:6). He is seen as the one who will bring in the New Covenant (31:31-34). **(52 Chapters)**

10. Zephaniah (Blessing Through Judgment): Though not specifically mentioned in this book, Messiah is presented as the Righteous One within the nation of Israel (3:5) who is also their King (3:15). **(3 Chapters)**

11. Habakkuk (Solution To Perplexity): Again in the light of the Christological nature of prophecy, Christ is portrayed as the Savior. The word "salvation," which appears three times in 3:13 and 18, is the root word from which the name "Jesus" is derived (see Matt. 1:21). He is also seen as the Holy One (cf. 1:12 with 1 John 1:9), the one who justifies the righteous by faith (2:4), and the one who will one day fill the earth "with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (2:14). **(3 Chapters)**

12. Daniel (Israel's Ultimate Destiny): One of the key portraits of Christ in Daniel is that of the coming Messiah who will be cut off (a reference to the cross) (9:25-26). However, Christ is also portrayed as the great stone who will crush the kingdoms of this world (2:34, 45), the son of man (7:13), and the Ancient of days

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(7:22). The vision in 10:5-9) is most likely a Christophany, an appearance of Christ (cf. Rev. 1:12-16). **(12 Chapters)**

13. Ezekiel (They Shall Know That I Am Yahweh): Christ, the Messiah, is pictured as a tender sprig that will be planted on a high and lofty mountain (17:23-24), a picture similar to that of the Branch in Isaiah (11:1), in Jeremiah (23:5; 33:15), and in Zechariah (3:8; 6:120. Ezekiel also speaks of Messiah as the King who has the right to rule (21:26-27) and who will minister as the true Shepherd (34:11-31). **(48 Chapters)**

14. Lamentations (A River of Tears): Lamentations includes two elements that portray the Savior: (1) It portrays Him as the Man of Sorrows who was acquainted with grief, who was afflicted, despised, and scorned by His enemies (cf. 1:12; 3:19; 2:15-16; 3:14, 30). (2) Jeremiah's weeping over the destruction of Jerusalem is perhaps also a picture of Christ who wept over Jerusalem (see Matt. 23:37-38). **(5 Chapters)**

15. Haggai (Encouragement): Here Messiah is portrayed as the Restorer of the Temple's glory (2:7-9) and the Overthrower of the kingdoms of the world (2:22). **(2 Chapters)**

16. Zechariah (The Jealousy of Yahweh): Perhaps no Old Testament book is more Messianic than Zechariah. It has been called, "the most Messianic, the most truly apocalyptic and eschatological of all the writings of the Old Testament" (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956, 5:3136). Zechariah presents Messiah or Christ in both of his advents and as both Servant and King, as Man and God, as the Angel of the Lord (3:1), the Righteous Branch (3:8), the Stone with the seven eyes (3:9), the Crucified Savior or the pierced One (12:10), the coming and humble King (9:9-10), the smitten Shepherd who will be abandoned (13:7), and the coming Judge and righteous King (14). **(14 Chapters)**

17. Malachi (Repent And Return): The Book of Malachi is the prelude to four hundred years of prophetic silence, broken by the words John the Baptist when he proclaimed, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Malachi predicts the coming of the messenger who will clear the way before the Lord (3:1; cf. Is. 40:30. John the Baptist later fulfills this prophecy, but in the next few verses (3:2-5) jump ahead to Christ in His second advent. **(4 Chapters)**

H. A Review of The Old Testament's Anticipation of Christ

By way of review, it would be well to remember that the **Law** laid the *foundation* for Christ by the election (Genesis), redemption (Exodus), sanctification (Leviticus), direction (Numbers), and instruction (Deuteronomy) of the nation of

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Israel as the custodians of the oracles of God (Rom. 3:1) and the channel for Messiah (Gen. 12:1f; Rom. 9:4-5).

Then further preparation for Christ was given in the **Historical Books** by giving the nation the Land of Israel for their possession (Joshua). The nation was then oppressed by foreign nations and was unfaithful, still God raised up judges and found faithfulness in the nation (Ruth). Stabilization was given to the nation under king Saul (1 Samuel), then expansion under king David (2 Samuel), and glorification of the nation under Solomon's reign (1 Kings 1-10). This was followed with division in the nation (1 Kings 11-22) into the northern 10 tribes and the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin. These both suffered deterioration (2 Chronicles) resulting eventually in deportation by Assyria and Babylon (2 Kings). Consequently, the Temple suffered deprivation (1 Chronicles) and destruction (2 Chronicles). However, God's faithfulness to His promises remained and so there was reconstruction of the Temple (Ezra) and restoration of a remnant of the nation to the land (Nehemiah) followed by protection of God's people (Esther).

All the while, in the **Poetical Books** there was always spiritual aspiration for Christ with the moral foundation being laid in the Law and the national framework being developed in the books of History.

Through the **Prophetical Books** we have the nation of Israel, through the prophets, looking forward with great expectation to Christ. This is done in the following ways: The earlier prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos) expect a national restoration by the Messiah. Isaiah and Micah predict international salvation through the coming of Christ. But Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah warn of God's retribution on the nations. Lamentations grieves over God's retribution on His people but Jeremiah looks for a covenantal reaffirmation in Christ. Ezekiel expects the nation's religious restoration and Daniel predicts its political restoration. After the Babylonian captivity Haggai and Zechariah exhort the people in their religious reconstruction and Malachi in their social and moral reconstruction, as they await the coming of the "sun of righteousness [that] shall rise, with healing in its wings" (Mal. 4:2). (Norman L. Geisler's, *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1977, pp. 227-228)