

THE TWELVE

(A Study of the Minor Prophets)

Introduction

The last twelve books of the Old Testament canon are often referred to as the Minor Prophets. The word “canon” means an ecclesiastical rule or law enacted by a council or other competent authority. When scholars refer to the “canon of Scripture,” it means the list of books contained in Scripture and recognized as worthy to be included in the sacred writings. When books are included in “the canon,” they have been recognized as being genuine and of divine inspiration. A term used by early Jewish rabbis was that these books “defiled the hands.” From a biblical standpoint, a book included in the canon of Scripture means that it was inspired by God.

2 Timothy 3:16

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

The title “the Minor Prophets” is believed to have originated from Augustine’s time (late fourth-century A.D.). This term is used simply because these books are much shorter than some of the other prophetic books such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel. For example, all chapters of these twelve prophets combined total 67 chapters. Isaiah itself is 66 chapters in length. However, they are no less important. “All” Scripture is inspired by God.

The first mention of “The Twelve” in writings can be found in Ecclesiasticus, an Apocryphal book by Jesus Ben Sira written around 190 B.C. After mentioning the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah, he writes, “And of the twelve prophets let the memorial be blessed, and let their bones flourish out of their place” (Ecclesiasticus 49:10).

Most of these books give reference to kings and/or events from the time they were written, but not all of the books provide this information. Based on what is known, the oldest of these books is probably the prophet Jonah, written somewhere between 785-770 B.C. The last of these books is the prophet Malachi, written around 400 B.C.

The Hebrew Scriptures were divided into three categories – The Law (Torah), The Prophets (Nevi’im), and The Writings (Kethuvim) – and contained 24 books. Jesus may have been referring to this division of the Old Testament in Luke 24:44.

Luke 24:44

Now he said to them, “These are my words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

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The 24 books of the Hebrew Canon

| The Law (Torah) | The Prophets (Nevi'im) | The Writings (Kethuvim) |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Genesis | Joshua | Psalms |
| Exodus | Judges | Proverbs |
| Leviticus | Samuel | Job |
| Numbers | Kings | Song of Songs |
| Deuteronomy | Isaiah | Ruth |
| | Jeremiah | Lamentations |
| | Ezekiel | Ecclesiastes |
| | The Twelve | Esther |
| | | Daniel |
| | | Ezra-Nehemiah |
| | | Chronicles |

In all versions of the Old Testament, the twelve are always grouped together. Some versions of the Greek Septuagint list them in a slightly different order, but they always are grouped together. It is not known what originally determined the final order of this list, but in the Hebrew Bible, the Roman Catholic Bible, and the Protestant Bible, they are listed as:

Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

The twelve prophets can also be grouped into three categories based on whether the prophecies were directed to the northern kingdom of Israel, the southern kingdom of Judah, or postexilic prophets. If one were to group the twelve in this manner, the groupings would be something like following chart.

The Twelve

| GROUP | BOOK | Approximate Dates | No. of Chapters | TOTAL |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-----------------|-------|
| PROPHETS OF ISRAEL | Jonah | 784-772 B.C. | 4 | 27 |
| | Amos | 765-755 B.C. | 9 | |
| | Hosea | 755-713 B.C. | 14 | |
| PROPHETS OF JUDAH | Obadiah | Date? 853 or 605 B.C. | 1 | 20 |
| | Joel | Date? 820 or 586 B.C. | 3 | |
| | Micah | 750-686 B.C. | 7 | |
| | Nahum | 663-612 B.C. | 3 | |
| | Habakkuk | 640-598 B.C. | 3 | |
| | Zephaniah | 640-609 B.C. | 3 | |
| POSTEXILIC PROPHETS | Haggai | 520-516 B.C. | 2 | 20 |
| | Zechariah | 520-516 B.C. | 14 | |
| | Malachi | 433-400 B.C. | 4 | |

When studying any of the prophets, one should study the books of Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah to provide the historical context in which they were written.

| KINGS OF ISRAEL | KINGS OF JUDAH | SCRIPTURE REFERENCE | THE TWELVE PROPHETS | |
|--|--|--|---|-------|
| Jehoash Jeroboam II Zechariah Shallum Menahem Pekahiah Pekah | Azariah (Uzziah) Jotham Ahaz Hezekiah Manasseh Amon Josiah Jehoahaz Jehoiakim Jehoiachin Zedekiah (carried captive to Babylon) | 2 Kgs 13:10-14:15 | Obadiah; Joel (??) Jonah Amos Hosea | |
| Hoshea (carried into captivity by Assyria) | | 2 Kgs 14:16-29; 2 Chr 26:1-23 | | Micah |
| | | 2 Kgs 15:1-12 | | |
| | | 2 Kgs 15:13-16 | | |
| | | 2 Kgs 15:17-22 | | |
| | | 2 Kgs 15:23-26 | | |
| | | 2 Kgs 15:27-31 | | |
| | | 2 Kgs 15:32-38; 2 Chr 27:1ff | Nahum Zephaniah Habakkuk | |
| | | 2 Kgs 16:1-20; 2 Chr 28:1ff | | |
| | | 2 Kgs 17:1-41; | | |
| | | 2 Kgs 18:1ff-20:1ff; 2 Chr 29:1ff-32:1ff | | |
| | | 2 Kgs 21:1-18; 2 Chr 33:1-20 | | |
| | | 2 Kgs 21:19-26; 2 Chr 33:21-25 | | |
| | 2 Kgs 22:1ff-23:30; 2 Chr 34:1ff-35:1ff | | | |
| | 2 Kgs 23:30-33; 2 Chr 36:1-3 | | | |
| | 2 Kgs 23:34-24:5; 2 Chr 36:4-8 | | | |
| | 2 Kgs 24:6-16; 2 Chr 36:8-10 | | | |
| | 2 Kgs 24:17-25:30; 2 Chr 36:11-21 | | | |
| 70 Years of captivity | in Babylon >>> | 2 Chr 36:22-23; Ezekiel; Daniel | | |
| Return from Exile - | Re-build the temple | Ezra | Haggai; Zechariah | |
| | Re-build the wall | Nehemiah | | |
| | | | Malachi | |

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HOSEA

Introduction/Background

Hosea 1:1

There is no more information about the man Hosea than what is recorded here. He is the son of Beeri. Chronologically, the book of Hosea follows after Jonah and Amos, but in the canon of Scripture, it is listed first. The name Hosea or *Oshea* means “salvation.”

Although the primary audience for the book of Hosea is the northern kingdom of Israel, there is admonition for Judah as well. The word of Yahweh came to Hosea during the day of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. The only king of Israel listed is Jeroboam (Jeroboam II). However, other kings of Israel reigned during this time. Israeli kings, Zechariah, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea, all came after King Jeroboam and ruled during the same time period as these kings of Judah. That means that Hosea’s prophecy spanned many years during the last, final days of the northern kingdom of Israel.

| Date (B.C.) | Kings of Israel | Kings of Judah | Hosea’s Ministry | Assyrian Kings | | |
|-------------|----------------------|----------------|------------------|---------------------|----------------|--|
| 805 | Jeroboam II | | HOSEA | Adad-Nirari III | | |
| 800 | | | | | | |
| 795 | | Uzziah | | | | |
| 790 | | | | | | |
| 785 | | | | | Shalmaneser IV | |
| 780 | | | | | | |
| 775 | | | | | | |
| 770 | | | | | Ashur-Dan II | |
| 765 | | Zechariah | | | | |
| 764 | | Shallum | | | | |
| 763 | Mehahem | | | | | |
| 760 | | Jotham | | | | |
| 753 | Pekahiah | | | Ashur-Nirari V | | |
| 751 | Pekah | | | | | |
| 745 | | | | Tilgath-Pileser III | | |
| 744 | | Ahaz | | | | |
| 735 | | | | | | |
| 731 | Hoshea | | | Shalmaneser V | | |
| 728 | | Hezekiah | | | | |
| 722 | Assyrian Captivity → | | | Sargon II | | |
| 715 | | | | | | |
| 710 | | | | | | |
| 705 | | | | Sennacherib | | |
| 700 | | | | | | |

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Chapter 1

Hosea 1:1-11

There is much background information relating to the northern Kingdom of Israel which is fundamental to understanding the context of what is being communicated through these children born to Hosea's "wife of harlotry." The history of the northern kingdom is wrought with idolatry from its very foundation.

1 Kings 12:25-33; 13:33-34

The first king, Jeroboam (not Jeroboam II), split from the nation of Judah, took 10 tribes and formed the northern kingdom of Israel. Rather than following Yahweh, Jeroboam set up golden calves at each end of his kingdom, one in Bethel and the other in Dan. This idolatry plagued northern Israel for the entire time it was a nation. Jeroboam became the standard of evil to which subsequent kings of Israel were compared (1 Kings 15:25-26, 33-34; 16:25-26).

1 Kings 16:29-31 – Not only did Ahab continue in the sins of Jeroboam with worshipping the golden calves, but he married Jezebel and introduced Baal worship into northern Israel. This worship of Baal continued for many years.

2 Kings 9:1-3; 6-10 – Finally, Elisha the prophet sent one of his young servants to anoint Jehu king over Israel and gave command to destroy the house of Ahab. Jehu killed Ahab and Jezebel. He then proceeded to have all the sons of Ahab killed.

2 Kings 10:1-3, 6-11 – In Jezreel, Jehu had all the sons of Ahab beheaded, killing all who remained of the house of Ahab. After this, Jehu brought all of the Baal worshippers into the house of Baal in Samaria and had them all slaughtered, eradicating Baal worship in Israel (2 Kings 10:18-28).

2 Kings 10:29-31 – However, even though Jehu ridded Israel of Baal worship, he did not depart from the golden calf worship, but rather he continued in the sin of Jeroboam.

2 Kings 14:23-24 – Jeroboam II was the great grandson of Jehu (3rd generation). He ruled longer than any king in northern Israel's history (41 years). The kings of Israel continued in the idolatry of Jeroboam, son of Nebat (2 Kings 15:8-9, 17-18; 23-24; 27-28).

Hosea is written during the times of these last kings of Israel as a nation. The book offers strong admonition and vivid imagery of Israel's sin and idolatry, warning of the judgment of Yahweh that would be coming. At the same time, great hope for the future is presented, and within the words of the prophet are calls for the people to repent and return so that God could heal them. The bloodshed at Jezreel did not bring an end to idolatry in the land. Yahweh said to Israel "Lo-ammi" – "You are not My people and I am not your God." However, there is a future hope for the restoration of Israel and hope when one leader will join them together. And others, who were "not my people" it will be said, "You are the songs of the Living God" (Romans 9:25-26). Then, great will be the day of Jezreel.