

Understanding The Book of the Twelve a.k.a. The Minor Prophets

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Introductory Statements:

1. The Hebrews counted all twelve books of the Minor Prophets as one book and appropriately called them "The Book of the Twelve."

2. The term "Minor" in the title "The Minor Prophets" does not refer to their message or importance but rather to their size when compared to the "Major Prophets." [Isaiah (66 chapters), Jeremiah (52 chapters), and Ezekiel (48 chapters).] To get an idea of the difference in size of the "Major and Minor Prophets" consider this, the "Major Prophets" average 55.3 chapters in length while the "Minor Prophets" average 5.58 chapters in length, an almost 10:1 ratio!

3. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and The Book of the Twelve make up the section known as the "Latter Prophets." The four books of the "Latter Prophets" balance out the four books of the "Former Prophets" (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, & Kings). These eight books are known as the Nevi'im in the Hebrew Bible.

4. The messages of the "Minor Prophets" is to be taken as seriously as the messages from the "Major Prophets," for all are words 'from the Lord.'

- a. "The word of the Lord that came to . . ." -Hosea 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jonah 1:1; 3:1; Micah 1:1; Zephaniah 1:1; Haggai 1:1, 2:1, 10, 20; Zechariah 1:1, 7, etc.
- b. "Thus says the Lord"-Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6, etc.; Micah 2:3, 3:5, 4:6, etc.; Nahum 1:12
- c. "Thus says the Lord God-Obadiah 1
- d. "The oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of visions of Nahum"- Nahum 1:1
- e. "The oracle of God which Habakkuk the prophet saw"- Habakkuk 2:1
- f. "The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi"-Malachi 1:1

5. The messages of the "Minor Prophets" are historically conditioned just as the messages of the "Major Prophets." To be 'historically conditioned' means that the message of the book can be understood properly only in the light of the historical situation that prompted God to send the prophet in the first place. Our interpretation of the book must grow out of the meaning of the book for its original audience. Historical allusions include:

- a. references to kings-Hosea 1:1; Amos 1:1, 7:10; Micah 1:1; Zephaniah 1:1; Haggai 1:1, 2:1, 10; Zechariah 1:1
- b. references to nations, peoples, or cities-Obadiah 1:1; Jonah 1:2, 3:2; Nahum 1:1; Habakkuk 1:6; Zephaniah 2:4, 8, 12-13
- c. references to crises, battles, etc.-
- d. references to significant acts-Haggai 1:8, 14, etc. In this case the significant act is the rebuilding of the temple, which occurred 520-516 B.C.