

Major Lessons from the  
**MINOR PROPHETS**  
**AN OVERVIEW**  
WITH PASTOR CARY GREEN

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	page 5
1A: Principles of Bible Interpretation.....	page 5
2A: The Importance of Knowing the Old Testament.....	page 6
3A: Resources Used to Study the Minor Prophets.....	page 9
4A: Goals for Our Study of the Minor Prophets.....	page 10
5A: The Meat of the Minor Prophets.....	page 11



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# -INTRODUCTION

2 Timothy 2:15

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth."

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## 1A: Principles of Bible Interpretation

→ 1B. The \_\_\_\_\_ principle

**First**, Scripture should be understood in its literal, natural, and normal sense. The Bible must be allowed to speak for itself; and in general, the Bible speaks in literal terms. While the Bible does contain figures of speech and symbols, they are intended to convey literal truth.

→ 2B. The \_\_\_\_\_ principle

**Second**, a passage should be interpreted in its historical context. What the author intended and what the text meant to its first audience must be taken into account for a proper, contextual understanding of the meaning of Scripture. That is WHY it is crucial for us to understand the historical background for each one of the Minor Prophets.

→ 3B. The \_\_\_\_\_ principle

**Third**, correct interpretation of a Biblical passage requires an understanding of the basic grammatical structure of each sentence. To whom do the pronouns refer? What is

the tense of the main verb? By asking simple questions like these, the meaning of the text will become clearer and clearer.

→ 4B. The \_\_\_\_\_ principle

**Fourth**, is the synthetic principle. This principle, also called the *analogia scriptura*, simply means that Scripture is to be its own \_\_\_\_\_. It assumes that the Bible does not contradict itself. Thus, if an interpretation of a passage conflicts with a truth taught elsewhere in the Scriptures, that interpretation cannot be correct. Scripture must be compared with Scripture in order to discover its accurate and full meaning.

→ 5B. The \_\_\_\_\_ principle

**Fifth**, please understand that God intended Scripture to be understood. However, not every portion of the Bible is equally clear. Therefore, we must allow the clearer portions to help us to rightly interpret the less clear.

## 2A.

### The Importance of Knowing the Old Testament

Studying the Old Testament is time consuming, but filled with many rewards. There are very important reasons for us to be students of the Old Testament.

#### 1B. It's divinely \_\_\_\_\_

The Old Testament is God-breathed! When the Apostle Paul wrote 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "*all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable...*," he was referring primarily to the Old Testament, for only a portion of the New Testament was written at that time.

When we dig into the riches of the Old Testament Scriptures, we will not only feed our souls, but we'll avoid being guilty of neglecting 3/4 of God's inspired Word.

## 2B. It's divine \_\_\_\_\_

The Old Testament reveals Who God is. Within the opening pages of human history, God puts His awesome power and magnificent glory as \_\_\_\_\_ on display, calling the universe into existence (Gen. 1-2). Then man sinned, and we see God's holiness and justice displayed as \_\_\_\_\_ of all the earth (Gen. 3). But in the same chapter, we find the first reference to the coming Messiah (Gen. 3:15), and from there on out the pages of Scripture unfold the glory of God as \_\_\_\_\_.

The Old Testament also reveals who \_\_\_\_\_ is. Though created holy, the glory of God's creation of man in His own image is abruptly interrupted by sin. In the pursuit of trying to be like God, man finds himself in a downward spiral of self-destruction, until "*every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*" (Gen. 6:5).

But the Old Testament also reveals God's \_\_\_\_\_ plan. Though sin has taken man on a downward path, God's plan **will** be accomplished in the way He has designed—by faith.

The Old Testament reveals the \_\_\_\_\_. On the Emmaus road, Jesus chided His two disciples for being "*slow of heart to believe in all that **the prophets** [Old Testament writers] have spoken*" regarding the Messiah (Luke 24:25).

## 3B. It's \_\_\_\_\_

The Old Testament provides an indispensable foundation for studying and understanding the New Testament. It precedes the New Testament historically and establishes the chronological context for understanding the unfolding of God's redemptive plan in the New Testament. As Old Testament scholar Walt Kaiser rightly observes, "*The Bible was meant to be read forward, not backward.*" In the early years of the New Testament Church, they had only the Old Testament Scriptures as their basis for theology. Paul, referring to the Old Testament, reminds Timothy: "*From childhood you have known **the sacred writings** which are **able to give you wisdom that leads to salvation***" (2 Tim. 3:15). Thus the Old Testament is crucial to interpreting and understanding the New Testament!

Jesus declared that the Old Testament spoke of Him (Luke 24:25, 27, 44) and testified of Him (John 5:39). The disciples and Stephen declared Christ from the Old Testament (Acts 2; 4; 7). New Testament preachers were grounded in the Old Testament (Peter–Acts 2, 3; Stephen–Acts 7; Philip–Acts 8 [cf. Isa 53]; Paul–Acts 14:15-17; 17:22ff). The Old Testament provides the background and foundation for the New Testament.

#### **4B. It's \_\_\_\_\_**

The authors of the New Testament looked to the Old Testament for confirmation. Peter's sermon in Acts 2 repeatedly referenced the Old Testament (Joel 2; 2 Sam. 7; Psa. 16; 110) to affirm the Apostles' New Testament message. Paul's appeal to the Roman Christians (Romans 9-10) follows the same pattern. Paul's offer of redemption to both Jew and Gentile is confirmed by Genesis 12:3. James' argument at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:13-17) is affirmed by the prophet Amos (Amos 9:12). The Old Testament corroborates and affirms the message of the New Testament.

#### **5B. It's \_\_\_\_\_**

The Old Testament is incredibly instructional! The manifold issues of life are rehearsed and addressed. The lofty things of God, His character and attributes, are often handled in everyday life theology.

For example:

- Genesis: the wages of \_\_\_\_\_; the mercy and grace of God.
- Exodus: the provision of a Passover lamb; the Ten Commandments.
- Leviticus: the \_\_\_\_\_ of God.
- Numbers: the consequences of faithless choices.
- Judges: the consequences of selfish living.
- Psalms: \_\_\_\_\_; prayer; doctrine of God; forgiveness.
- Ecclesiastes: culture/worldview.
- Song of Solomon: marital love.
- Lamentations: suffering.
- Zechariah: the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Messiah.



Long before Paul highlighted the equipping power of the Word, David asserted in \_\_\_\_\_ that the Word is perfect, trustworthy, right, radiant, pure, and sure, and that the eternally relevant Word is righteous altogether, accomplishing regeneration, wisdom, joy, and understanding. Greater than any possession (v. 10a) and any pleasure (v. 10b), the Word becomes our greatest protection (v. 11) and greatest purifier (v. 13).

But nowhere are the instructional benefits of the Old Testament more clearly delineated than in \_\_\_\_\_. The text is replete with instructions for the believer's growth and maturation, both of which are gained through the study of it. For example, the psalmist repeatedly highlights the priority of obeying the Word (vv.1-8), memorizing the Word (v. 11), meditating on the Word (vv. 15, 23, 48), receiving guidance from the Word (v. 105), and praying for understanding of the Word (v. 73). And though all of this is also true of the New Testament, at the time it was written, it was referring to Old Testament Scriptures, for that's all there was.

### 3A.

## Resources Used to Study the Minor Prophets



- *The MacArthur Handbook*—by John MacArthur.
- *Major Points from the Minor Prophets*—by John Blanchard.
- *12 Faith Journeys of the Minor Prophets*—by Nathan Jones and Steve Howell.
- *Preaching the Minor Prophets*—by Irv Busenitz.
- *Exploring the Minor Prophets*—by John Phillips.
- *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament*—by Irving L. Jensen.
- *Talk Thru the Bible*—by Wilkinson and Boa.



## 4A.

### Goals for Our Study of the Minor Prophets

#### 1B. Know their \_\_\_\_\_

In the following weeks, you'll have the chance to meet Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. As we embark on this study, I want to help you put each one of these twelve prophets and their messages into the proper context. So we will look at each one of their Titles, their Author and Date, their Background and Setting, Key People, Historical and Theological Themes, etc.

#### 2B. Know their \_\_\_\_\_

Each prophet wrote with a specific audience in mind, and each dealt with issues that require some background information that must be understood. Lord willing, we will walk through each message and cover the important points. There is no way to go into great depth with our limited time. I simply want to help you get an overview of each book and gain familiarity with the highlights of each prophet's messages.

#### 3B. Apply their \_\_\_\_\_

Third, I also want the information to be practical. Every day we experience challenges to our faith in God. And so as we study each Minor Prophet, I want us—

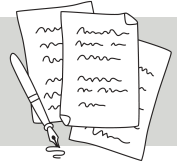
- to look at how the Minor Prophets reacted to the challenges they faced,
- to read the lessons they learned,
- and to apply that wisdom to our own lives.

## 4B. Explore fulfilled \_\_\_\_\_

And finally, I will show you a complete list of the prophecies recorded by that particular author. And you will discover that numerous prophecies have already been fulfilled in amazing detail, substantiated by historical records during Old Testament history and during the First Coming of Christ. Fulfilled Bible prophecy provides some of the greatest proof that the Bible is indeed the Word of God and, therefore, you can put your faith and trust in what it teaches.

And by knowing that God's prophetic Word always comes true, you can with certainty trust that the other prophecies uttered by the prophets will indeed be fulfilled in the future, either during the Last Days (our age), the Tribulation, the Second Coming of Christ, the Millennial Kingdom, or the Eternal State.

## 5A. The Meat of the Minor Prophets



### Quote:

*"The Bible is as up to date as the morning newspaper." –George Bernard Shaw*

And as you are about to discover, the messages of these twelve prophets are very \_\_\_\_\_.

Their messages, once declared to the people of God in the past, are in dire need of being heard and heeded by the people of God in the present.

At a time of moral degeneration and immense social and cultural upheaval, God's call through these Minor Prophets is a word for our times.

How many of you have ever **studied** the Minor Prophets?

I'm sure most of us have read them at one point or another in our Bible reading, BUT have you ever slowed down enough to study them?

Even though these twelve books constitute about \_\_\_% of the Old Testament's prophetic teaching, they are read much less often than the other five books commonly known as the Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel).

## THREE GROUPS OF THE TWELVE MINOR PROPHETS

GROUP	BOOK	NUMBER OF CHAPTERS	TOTAL
1-PROPHETS OF ISRAEL	JONAH	4	27
	AMOS	9	
	HOSEA	14	
2-PROPHETS OF JUDAH	OBADIAH	1	20
	JOEL	3	
	MICAH	7	
	NAHUM	3	
	HABAKKUK	3	
	ZEPHANIAH	3	
3-POSTEXILIC PROPHETS	HAGGAI	2	20
	ZECHARIAH	14	
	MALACHI	4	

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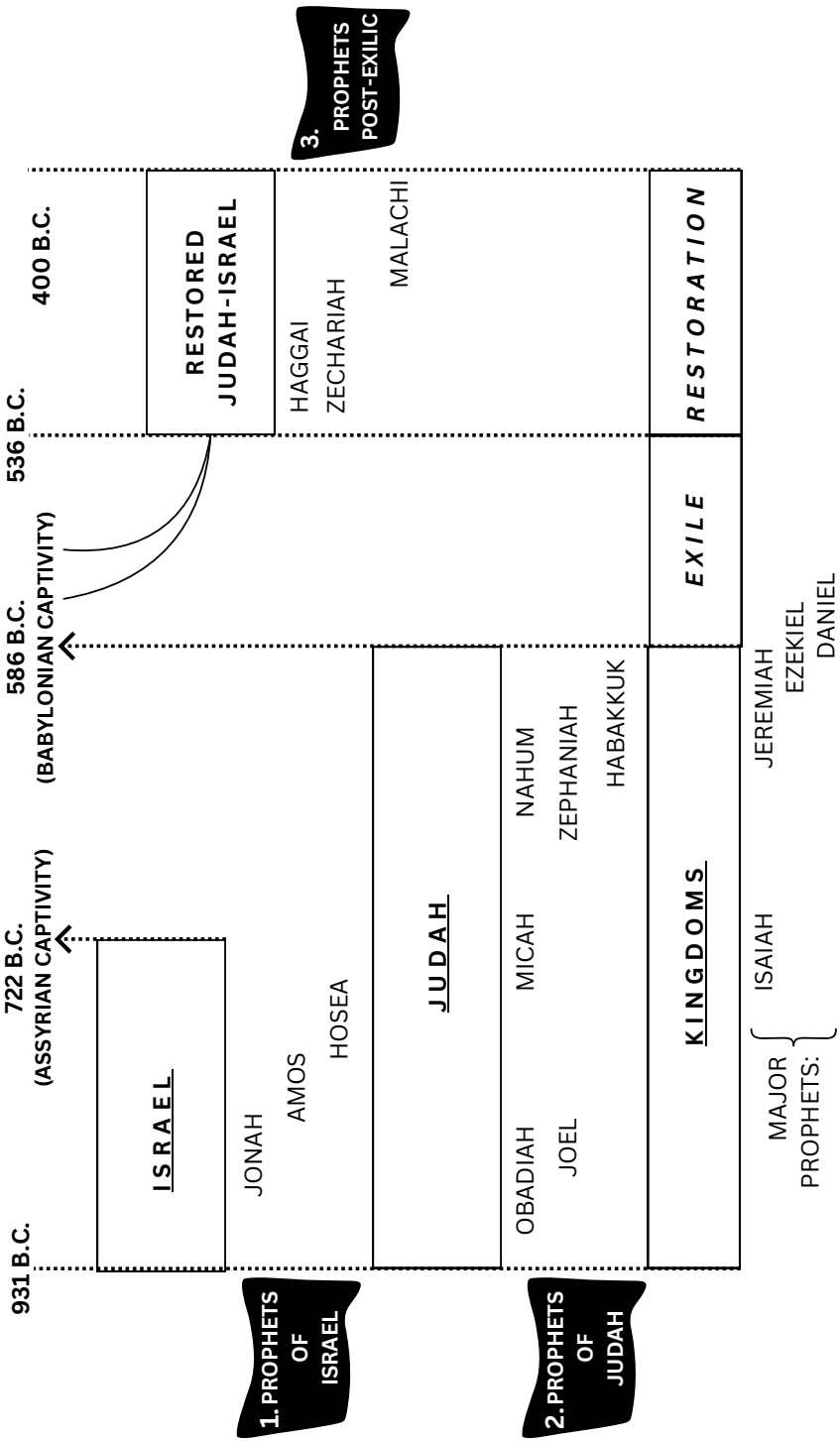
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# THREE GROUPS OF MINOR PROPHETS



NAME	DATE	AUDIENCE	WORLD POWER	BIBLICAL CONTEXT	OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES TO THE PROPHET	THEME
Isaiah	c. 740-680	Pre-exile Judah	Assyria	2 Kin. 15:1—20:21 2 Chr. 26:16—32:33	2 Kings 19—20 (passim) 2 Chr. 26:22; 32:20, 32 Isaiah (passim)	Salvation of the Lord
Jeremiah	c. 627-580	Pre-exile Judah	Assyria & Babylonia	2 Kin. 22:3—25:30 2 Chr. 34:1—36:21	2 Chr. 35:25; 36:12, 21ff. Ezra 1:1 Daniel 9:2 Jeremiah (passim)	Warning of Coming Judgment
Ezekiel	c. 593-571	Exiles in Babylonia	Babylonia	2 Kin. 24:8—25:30 2 Chr. 36:9-21	Ezekiel 1:3; 24:24	Glory of the Lord
Daniel	c. 605-535	Exiles in Babylonia	Babylonia & Medo-Persia	2 Kin. 23:34—25:30 2 Chr. 36:4-23	Ezekiel 14:14, 20, 28:3 Daniel (passim)	Sovereignty of God over men and nations
Hosea	c. 755-715	Pre-exile Israel	Assyria	2 Kin. 14:23—18:12	Hosea 1:1-2	Loyal Love of God
Joel	c. 835	Pre-exile Judah	Assyria	2 Kin. 12:1-21 2 Chr. 24:1-27	Joel 1:1	Day of the Lord
Amos	c. 760-753	Pre-exile Israel	Assyria	2 Kin. 14:23—15:7	Amos 1:1; 7:8-14; 8:2	Judgment on Israel
Obadiah	c. 848-841	Pre-exile Edom	Assyria	2 Kin. 8:16-24 2 Chr. 21:1-20	Obadiah 1	Doom on Edom
Jonah	c. 782-753	Pre-exile Assyria	Assyria	2 Kin. 13:10-25; 14:23-29	2 Kings 14:25 Jonah (passim)	Salvation to the Gentiles
Micah	c. 735-700	Pre-exile Judah	Assyria	2 Kin. 15:32—19:37 2 Chr. 27:1—32:23	Micah 1:1 Jeremiah 26:18	Injustice of Judah and Justice of God
Nahum	c. 664-654	Pre-exile Assyria	Assyria	2 Kin. 21:1-18 2 Chr. 35:1-20	Nahum 1:1	The Destruction of Nineveh
Habakkuk	c. 609-605	Pre-exile Judah	Babylonia	2 Kin. 23:31—24:7 2 Chr. 36:1-8	Habakkuk 1:1; 3:1	The Just Shall Live by Faith
Zephaniah	c. 632-628	Pre-exile Judah	Assyria	2 Kin. 22:1-2 2 Chr. 34:1-7	Zephaniah 1:1	Judgment and Blessing in the Day of the Lord
Haggai	c. 520	Post-exile Jews who returned to Jerusalem from Babylonia	Medo-Persia	Ezra 5:1—6:15	Ezra 5:1; 6:14 Haggai (passim)	Rebuilding the Temple
Zechariah	c. 520-480	Post-exile Jews who returned to Jerusalem from Babylonia	Medo-Persia	Ezra 5:1—6:15	Ezra 5:1; 6:14 Nehemiah 12:16 Zechariah 1:1,7; 7:1,8	Future Blessing for Israel
Malachi	c. 432-424	Post-exile Jews who returned to Jerusalem from Babylonia	Medo-Persia	Nehemiah 13:1-31	Malachi 1:1	Appeal to Backsliders

These twelve books give us a clear grasp of how God's chosen servants reacted to the massive *political, social, and religious* changes that swept through Israel and Judah 3,000 years ago.

We see the devastating effects of corruption eating away the moral fibre of a nation, and we are given breathtaking glimpses of God's sovereignty, His hatred of sin, and His amazing love.

These gems in God's Word will act as a powerful stabilizer for our minds and hearts, as we face many of the same cultural changes and challenges in our country in the twenty-first century.

So as we prepare to look at each book over the summer, let's ask and answer a few questions about them:

- Who were they?
- Why are they known as "Minor Prophets"?
- Why should we read them?
- When and where did they live?
- What was their ministry?
- What message did they bring?

Once we have answers to these questions we will be in a much better position to look at the prophets' main themes before focusing on some of the specific statements made by each one of them.

## 1B. Who were the Minor Prophets?

The answer to this first question is that they were the \_\_\_\_\_ of the last twelve books in the Old Testament:

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

This is the order in which the books appear in our present Bible, although this has not always been the case.

The important thing to remember is that in this and all other arrangements, they were always seen as a unit, NOT as twelve unconnected books or documents.

Before the time of Christ these twelve books were joined together to make one scroll known as "The \_\_\_\_\_."

The Twelve Minor Prophets have never been seriously challenged as being part of the inspired \_\_\_\_\_ of Scripture.

Their combined length (sixty-seven chapters) is about equal to that of Isaiah.

This is a striking example of a much wider truth, which is that the Bible is not only amazing in its diversity, but also in its unity.

It's not so much a single Book, as a " \_\_\_\_\_ " of sixty-six books written by some forty authors in three languages (Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic) on three continents (Africa, Asia, and Europe) over a period of about 1,500 years.



It contains history, laws, public records, biography, poetry, prophecy, sermons, hymns, personal correspondence, open letters, and miscellaneous other documents.

The writers were not \_\_\_\_\_ authors; they were soldiers, priests, fishermen, shepherds, a Jewish rabbi, and a Gentile doctor.

If questioned about ordinary issues of everyday life they would have held a great variety of views colored by their diverse backgrounds and cultures. Yet, in dealing with the most important issues that have ever occupied human minds, and without any collaboration or "fixing," their individual contributions to the Bible combined to produce a unity and coherence **utterly unique** in all \_\_\_\_\_.

There is nothing more important to us when studying the Bible than to realize that while it uses many different "accents" (reflecting the life and times of the authors concerned), *it speaks with one* \_\_\_\_\_.

The critic who says that the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New Testament, and that the two Testaments contradict each other, has misread both.

The reason for the Bible's stunning unity is perfectly straightforward.

It is because every single word of it, as originally written, was "*breathed out by God*" (2 Tim. 3:16).

The human authors were not penning their personal opinions, nor were they merely expressing their deeply-held convictions. Instead, "*men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*" (2 Pet. 1:21).

## Quote:

*“The Holy Spirit moved men to write. He allowed them to use their own style, culture, gifts, and character, to use the results of their own study and research, to write of their own experience, and to express what was in their mind.*

*At the same time, the Holy Spirit did not allow error to influence their writings; He overruled in the expression of thought and in the choice of words. Thus they recorded accurately all that God wanted them to say and exactly how He wanted them to say it, in their own character, style, and language.” –Brian Edwards*

## 2B. Why are they called “Minor Prophets”?

*Minor. Strange. Little. Unimportant. Unused. Dusty.* These are all words many people think of when they encounter these Old Testament writings. AND SO the Minor Prophets don't get much attention.

BUT that is NOT WHY we refer to these 12 books as the “Minor Prophets.”

In his famous book *City of God*, first published around 425 AD, the great African theologian Aurelius Augustinus, better known as \_\_\_\_\_ of Hippo, first gave them this name; but in doing so, he was not suggesting that their contributions to Scripture were in any way inferior to the other fifty-four books of the Bible.

Nor could he have meant that they were the shortest books in the whole Old Testament, since four of the Minor Prophets are longer than the book of Ruth, and two are longer than Ruth, Ezra, and Esther.

Instead, he was simply pointing out that the Minor Prophets are the shortest of the Old Testament's \_\_\_\_\_ books (Ruth, Ezra, and Esther are historical, not prophetic).

Now, let me be crystal clear about something—the fact that these books are relatively short does not mean that their message is unimportant, because ***NOTHING God says is unimportant.***

Although He is concerned with even the tiniest details of our lives, He makes no small talk.

As far as the Minor Prophets are concerned, we could have no greater incentive to treat their words seriously than to notice the way in which they are used in the \_\_\_\_\_.

For instance, when Jesus said, *“I desire mercy, and not sacrifice”* (Mat. 12:7), He was quoting Hosea (6:6).

When He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey (Mat. 21:1-5), He was fulfilling the words of \_\_\_\_\_ (9:9).

When Paul wrote, *“The righteous shall live by faith”* (Rom. 1:17), he was quoting Habakkuk (2:4).

And when on the Day of Pentecost Peter told the crowds that these were *“the last days”* (Acts 2:17), he was quoting \_\_\_\_\_ (2:28-32).

Thus we must approach the Minor Prophets with a spirit of reverent submission, accepting their writings as integral parts of *“the living and abiding Word of God”* (1 Peter 1:23).

And DO NOT forget:

### **Romans 15:4**

**4** For **whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction**, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

### **2 Timothy 3:15-17**

**15** and that from childhood you have known **the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation** through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

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

**17** so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

## **3B. Why should we read them?**

When compared to the massive writings of the Major Prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, the writings of the Minor Prophets can seem minuscule.

The combined 12 books of the Minor Prophets comprise less than 7% of the entire Old Testament.

And unfortunately, because of their short length, these books are often overlooked and deemed of little value.

In addition, while other well-known Bible heroes have compelling stories, most of the Minor Prophets don't include their \_\_\_\_\_ narratives.

Other than Jonah, whose encounter with a large \_\_\_\_\_ won him notoriety, and Hosea, whose difficult marriage was immortalized in the pages of Scripture, little is known about the rest of these men—Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

So the Minor Prophets can seem like faceless mouthpieces for God, not interesting individuals in their own right.

But how wrong we would be to ignore them!

When we just take the time to understand their writings, the Minor Prophets and their messages turn out to be amazingly profound.

They fill us with hope and wonder, all the while convicting us of sin, and challenging us to faithfully follow God.

#### **4B. When and where did they live?**

To answer these questions we must take a broad look at Old Testament history.

Somewhere around 1500 BC, God's people, the Israelites, were miraculously delivered from their captivity in Egypt.

This event is commonly called the \_\_\_\_\_, and after forty years of wandering in the desert the people arrived in the Promised Land of Canaan.

For the next \_\_\_\_\_ years their national government was in the hands of locally based judges, and then later passed to Eli (a priest and a judge) and eventually to Samuel (a judge and a prophet), who served as both judicial and religious leaders.

When threatened by an invasion some time later, the people demanded a king who could unify the nation and lead their army.

As a result of their lobbying, Saul was anointed as the first king of Israel, but he proved a failure, and it then fell to David, a young man from Bethlehem, to unite the kingdom around the new capital city, \_\_\_\_\_.

David was in turn succeeded by his tenth son, Solomon, who strengthened the nation's unity by building an impressive \_\_\_\_\_ in Jerusalem as a focal point of the people's worship.

Around 930 BC Solomon died, and his place was taken by his son, Rehoboam, whose economic policy and other follies caused \_\_\_\_\_ of the nation's twelve tribes to revolt and form a breakaway northern kingdom which adopted the name of Israel (though also at times called *Jacob* or *Ephraim*), leaving the two tribes of Benjamin and Judah (together usually called *Judah*) in the south.

During the next 200 years the northern kingdom had twenty different kings, \_\_\_\_\_ of whom "*did what was evil in the sight of the Lord*" (1 Kings 15:26), often in promoting blatant idolatry. The downward spiral continued until 722 BC when Israel was invaded by the Assyrians. Most of its population was deported, and the northern kingdom was brought to an end. This was God's judgment on two centuries of rebellion against His ways.

## **2 Kings 17:7**

*7 And this occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, Who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and they had feared other gods....*

The southern kingdom of \_\_\_\_\_ fared somewhat better, surviving 136 years past Israel's deportation.

It had a succession of nineteen kings, many of them wicked, but \_\_\_\_\_ of whom served the Lord with varying degrees of fervency.

Some, like good King Hezekiah, *"did what was right in the eyes of the Lord"* (2 Kings 18:3), while others, like his terrible son Manasseh, *"did what was evil in the sight of the Lord"* (2 Kings 21:2).

As the result of these radical changes of leadership, Judah went on a spiritual roller coaster ride of revival and recession until 586 BC, when Babylon, under Nebuchadnezzar, flattened Jerusalem, destroying the temple and deporting the cream of the population.

Yet unlike that of Israel, the exile of Judah lasted for only seventy years. By then the Babylonians had been overthrown by Cyrus, King of Persia, who soon issued an edict allowing any exiles living in his newly acquired territory to return home and reinstate their national gods.

Countless exiles from Judah took advantage of the program, and \_\_\_\_\_ was appointed to lead the first swath of 50,000 deportees back to Jerusalem in 538 BC. Others followed in 458 BC and 444 BC, and Zerubbabel supervised the rebuilding of the Jerusalem \_\_\_\_\_, a project that took twenty-two years and was completed in 515 BC.

Seventy years later, the walls of Jerusalem had been rebuilt, and in the years that followed, the religious and social structure of the nation was gradually reconstituted.

We can now zoom in a little closer to understand the Minor Prophets' place in history.

To do this, we need to focus on the period from about 800 BC to 400 BC, from a point some time after the united kingdom had been split into Israel in the north and Judah in the south, until after Judah's return to Jerusalem.

Locating the individual prophets' positions within these four centuries is more difficult, but we can narrow things down to this general framework:

–Hosea and Amos prophesied **to** \_\_\_\_\_ at some time **prior** to the nation's exile in 722 BC.

–Jonah lived in Israel and prophesied **to** \_\_\_\_\_ **of the Assyrians** prior to Israel's exile in 722 AD.

–Micah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah prophesied **to** \_\_\_\_\_ **prior** to the Babylonians ransacking it in 586 BC. Nahum also seems to have prophesied during this time.

–Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi prophesied **to** \_\_\_\_\_ **after** its return from Babylon.

–This leaves us with Joel and Obadiah. Cases have been made for dates ranging across almost the entire period from 800 to 400BC, but exact dating of their ministries is not critical for understanding their messages.

## **5B. What was their ministry?**

One of the best ways to describe their function is to look at the two words used to describe these twelve authors in most English translations of the Old Testament–  
" \_\_\_\_\_ " and "*prophet.*"



In telling the story of Saul being anointed as Israel's first king, there is the comment (put in brackets in some of our modern translations) that "*today's 'prophet' was formerly called a seer*" (1 Samuel 9:9).

There is a significant point here that can easily be missed.

The first thing to notice about a prophet is not what he \_\_\_\_\_, but what he \_\_\_\_\_; in other words, he is a "seer" before he is a "sayer."

Sometimes prophets saw such things as angels and visions, but above all else what they caught was a glimpse of *the mind of God*.

In many ways they were quite \_\_\_\_\_ people.

For example, a New Testament writer says of Elijah, an Old Testament prophet, that he was a man "*with a nature like ours*" (James 5:17).

Simply put, Elijah was no better than we are, prone to all our failures and weaknesses, exposed to the same temptations and trials, and (as we can see by reading his story) liable to the same mood swings and inconsistencies.

But for the furtherance of His own sovereign purposes, God chose to open up His \_\_\_\_\_ to the prophets, telling them how He saw certain things, and what He intended to do as a result.

The most beautiful expression of this comes in something the Bible says in relation to Moses, a great religious leader, Law-giver, and prophet.

We are told that God "*used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend*" (Ex. 33:11).

God took the prophets into His confidence and told them things they could not have discovered in any other way.

There is a New Testament parallel in the writings of the Apostles, as Paul had no hesitation in pointing to the divine source of his words:

**1 Corinthians 2:7-9**

**7** but **we speak God's wisdom** in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory;

**8** the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;

**9** but just as it is written,

*"Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard,*

*And which have not entered the heart of man,*

*All that God has prepared for those who love Him."*

Isaiah gives a brilliant illustration of the prophet's role to **see** and to **say**.

He records some of God's people as saying to the prophets,

**Isaiah 30:10**

**10** **"Do not see . . . do not prophesy** to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions."

These people rebelled against what the prophets were saying, and as the prophets were only saying what they were seeing, the people told them to stop seeing!

Yet God's special messenger was not only a "seer" but a "sayer," and the meaning of the word "prophet" becomes clear as soon as we unpack that word.

The *-phet* part is based on a verb meaning "to speak," while *pro-* has two meanings—"before" and "for."

Pulling these together, we can see that the prophet spoke \_\_\_\_\_ something happened and \_\_\_\_ (that is, on behalf of) someone else.

The usual (and perfectly correct) way of expressing this is to say that the prophets both **foretold** and **forth told**.

Some people try to play down the **foretelling** and to suggest that the prophets' main ministry was one of **forth telling**, of simply declaring what God was saying; but this is not the case.

The \_\_\_\_\_ of future events is a major element in every prophetic book in the Old Testament.

Some of these prophecies were fulfilled in the lifetime of the prophet concerned, and some were fulfilled in New Testament times.

Others—such as the Second Coming of Christ and the universal resurrection of the dead to final judgment—have yet to be fulfilled.

Whatever the timing of the fulfillment, the prophets' predictions were a crucial part of their ministry.

In fact, one of them records God Himself as saying,

**Amos 3:7**

*7 "Surely the Lord God does nothing  
Unless He reveals His secret counsel  
To His servants the prophets."*

By reading Old Testament prophecies we can sketch in a broad scenario of world history from the time when they were given right up to the present day and even to the very end of time.

Yet no true prophet foretold the future just to satisfy men's curiosity about what was about to happen, to project his own personality or ministry, or to prove he was in close touch with God.

When a prophet spoke in the name of the Lord it was always to bring people to \_\_\_\_\_, faith, and obedience.

The object of Old Testament prophecy was not to get people jumping to their feet, but to get them falling to their knees in awe and in submission to the will of God.

In **forthtelling**, the emphasis was on the fact that the prophet was God's spokesman and must be obedient to his divine commission.

An incident in Exodus provides a perfect illustration of this.

When God told Moses to go to Pharaoh, commanding him to release God's people from their captivity in Egypt, Moses protested that he was ill-equipped for the task.

**Exodus 4:10**

**10** *Then Moses said to the Lord, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."*

God's reply could not have been clearer.

**Exodus 4:11-12**

**11** *The Lord said to him, "**Who has made man's mouth?** Or Who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?*

**12** ***Now then go**, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say."*

Yet even this was not enough to motivate Moses, who feebly replied,

**Exodus 4:13**

**13** *... "Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will."*

In other words, "Please, Lord, send someone else..." This attempt to wriggle out of things angered God, yet He graciously made a remarkable concession:

**Exodus 4:14-16**

**14** *"Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart.*

**15** *You are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and **I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth**, and I will teach you what you are to do.*

**16** *Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and he will be as a mouth for you, and you will be as God to him."*

God used His prophets in such a way that the words they spoke would be the \_\_\_\_\_ words God would have spoken to the people, had He chosen to do so directly.

This is a great illustration of the Biblical truth that when the Old Testament prophets spoke in God's name, they used the very words God wanted them to use, making the Source of their message the guarantee of its authority and inerrancy.

This is stated throughout the prophetic books, not least in those written by the Minor Prophets.

Hosea begins,

**Hosea 1:1**

**1 The word of the Lord** which came to Hosea...

And Joel, Micah, Zephaniah, Zechariah, and Malachi introduce all they have to say in much the same way.

Earlier in the Old Testament there is another beautiful illustration of the same truth when, among his last words, \_\_\_\_\_ claimed,

**2 Samuel 23:2**

**2 "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His Word was on my tongue."**

This is exactly the kind of thing the Apostle \_\_\_\_\_ meant when centuries later he wrote,

**2 Peter 1:21**

**21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**

It is precisely what \_\_\_\_\_ had in mind when he insisted,

**2 Timothy 3:16**

**16 All Scripture is breathed out by God...**

He underlined this when commending the Christians at Thessalonica for accepting his ministry,

**1 Thessalonians 2:13**

**13** ...not as the word of men but for what it really is, **the Word of God**....

This is the only consistent Biblical way of interpreting Scripture:

**What the Bible says, God says.**

Quote:

*"The two Testaments are the two lips by which God has spoken to us." –Thomas Watson*

There are those in certain church circles today who dare to make claims on a par with those made by the Old Testament prophets.

They can be heard on religious television and radio programs and in pulpits all around the world, making bold claims to be prophets for today, or apostles for today's Church, entrusted with a special word from God for today's generation.

Is there no difference between these men (and women) and the Bible's prophets?

The simplest way to answer the question is to notice that an Old Testament prophecy was a means by which

an **infallible God**  
used **fallible men**  
to bring **an infallible word**  
to **fallible people**.

This meant that when exercising their ministries, **Old Testament prophets** \_\_\_\_\_ **made a false statement**, because God guaranteed the integrity of every word He gave them to speak.

These prophets were subject to a very stringent \_\_\_\_\_, which God explained like this:

**Deuteronomy 18:21-22**

**21** *"You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?'*

**22** *When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him."*

Notice carefully what is being said here.

God does *not* say that if someone claims to make a God-given prophecy, and the prophecy comes to pass (or appears to), this proves it to have been a genuine message from God.

What he *does* say is that IF the prophecy is NOT fulfilled, the so-called prophet is not genuine.

Notice how strict this test is!

If someone claims to make a prophecy in God's name—even a small, "localized," seemingly insignificant prophecy—and the event prophesied does NOT come to pass, the person concerned is disqualified; he is not what he claims to be.

When claiming to speak in God's name, his own integrity was on the line, as a true prophet \_\_\_\_\_ got it wrong.

This has serious implications at the present time. It is not enough to say that "some" predictions come to pass; they must ALL be infallibly accurate.

We must also note that the slightest error in a prophecy does not merely dismantle the prophecy, **it \_\_\_\_\_ the person claiming to be a prophet.**

Some teach that prophecy is a mixed phenomenon; sometimes it's true, but other times it doesn't quite work out, because the human instrument is fallible.

Some say that prophecy "is nearly always a \_\_\_\_\_ of God's Spirit and our thinking," while others speak of "non-infallible prophecy."

But "non-infallible prophecy" is a contradiction in terms!

Quote:

*"The question of how it is possible for men to receive a word from the throne of the universe, and then give it out mixed with error, cannot be answered satisfactorily."*

– Geoff Thomas

How can there possibly be a God-inspired Word that is "non-infallible"?

A crucial New Testament statement draws a line under the whole issue.

### **Hebrews 1:1-2**

**1** *God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,*

**2** *in these last days has spoken to us in His Son,*

*Whom He appointed Heir of all things, through Whom also He made the world.*

We do not have Biblically-endorsed prophets today. And why not? BECAUSE we no longer have any need of them.

We have within our hands—the complete Word of God, revealing the Person of \_\_\_\_\_.



Instead of prophets, we need *exegetes, expositors, preachers, and teachers* of the faith that was “*once for all delivered to the saints*” (Jude 3).

We need preachers who will give themselves sacrificially to the study of the Word of God and to its systematic exegesis and exposition, “accurately handling the Word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15) and boldly applying its truth to their hearers.

### Quote:

*“The preacher will take care that what he offers is not his own ideas, but God’s message from God’s Book, and will see it as his task not to talk for his text, but to let the text talk through him.” - J.I. Packer*

Another important point needs to be made here. Not only should we rely wholeheartedly on the faithful exposition of the Bible as the written Word of God, BUT we should not insist on signs and wonders as an authentication of a preacher’s ministry.

This is made crystal clear in a story Jesus told about a rich man and Lazarus.

When the rich man had died and was in Hades, he pleaded with Abraham to send Lazarus (who had also died, but was by then in “*Abraham’s bosom*,” a synonym for Paradise) back to earth to warn the rich man’s five brothers of the appalling fate awaiting them if they did not repent.

Abraham’s reply was terse and telling:

### **Luke 16:31**

**31** *“If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, **neither will they be convinced** if someone rises from the dead.”*

The message is clear: if people will not listen to the \_\_\_\_\_ of God and turn to Him in repentance and faith as a result, no “signs and wonders” will move them to do so, not even a long-buried friend coming back to life.

The Bible is the only infallible Word we have or need, revealing to us that in the Lord Jesus Christ we have the \_\_\_\_\_ to end all prophets, the Priest to end all priests, and the King to end all kings.

\_\_\_\_\_!!!

## 6B. What message did they bring?

These sixty-seven chapters touch on a vast variety of subjects—theological, spiritual, moral, and political, as well as prophetic. Yet there are five themes that dominate their authors' writings.

- ***The utter and undeniable \_\_\_\_\_ of God***

When Haggai records God as saying, *"I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land"* (Haggai 2:6), he is declaring a bedrock truth that underlies all of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.

Not a single atom exists, nor does a single event occur, outside the settled sovereignty of God.

As King David says,

***"Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps"*** (Psa. 135:6).

### Quote:

*"God has spoken by His prophets, spoken His unchanging Word;  
Each from age to age proclaiming: God, the One, the righteous Lord;  
In the world's despair and turmoil, One firm anchor still holds fast;  
God is King, His throne eternal, God the first and God the last."*

– George Wallace Briggs

- **God's inevitable \_\_\_\_\_ against sin**

The Minor Prophets have a great deal to say about God's hatred of sin and His righteous punishment of it, not only at the time they were writing, but as a general principle, and finally at the end of time, when all nations will stand before God on *"the great and terrible day of the Lord"* (Mal. 4:5).

This will be the moment when *"each of us will give an account of himself to God"* (Rom. 14:12).

When God tells Joel, *"I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations"* (Joel 3:12), He is crystallizing awesome truth repeated throughout the Minor Prophets.

**Quote:**

*"Reading the prophets can be an unsettling experience. Here we see God's utter, absolute fury against sin. The graphic accounts of what God is going to do to His own faithless, immoral, complacent people constitute some of the scariest words in all of literature." – Gene Veith*

- **God's amazing \_\_\_\_\_**

However, the love of God also runs like a river through all of their writings, reflecting Joel's declaration that God is *"gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness, and relenting of evil"* (Joel 2:13).

Many people wrongly think that whereas the wrath of God is emphasized in the Old Testament, the emphasis in the New Testament is on the love of God, but this gives a distorted picture. The truth is that there are more references to the love of God in the \_\_\_\_\_ Testament than in the New, and the most complete statements about the final wrath of God against sin are in the \_\_\_\_\_ Testament rather than in the Old.

## Quote:

*"The move from the Old Testament to the New Testament is not a move from a wrathful God to a loving God. Rather, the New Testament ratchets up both themes."  
—D. A. Carson*

For their part, the Minor Prophets reflect both *"the kindness and the severity of God"* (Rom. 11:22), and only when we give full weight to all the Bible says about both, do we have a true picture.

If we ignore either His kindness or His severity, we are left with a lopsided caricature of God.

- **A passionate \_\_\_\_\_ to get right with God**

Superficial readers tend to picture the prophets as dealing out unrelenting condemnation, but this is not a true reflection of their message.

They certainly paint sin and its consequences in stark and dreadful colors, but they have a passion for people to \_\_\_\_\_ of their sin, to abandon their backsliding, to stop compromising, to seek after holiness, and to enter into the blessing God longs to give them.

The prophets repeatedly draw attention to this in statements such as, *"Return to me . . . that I may return to you"* (Zech. 1:3).

- **The coming of \_\_\_\_\_**

All of the prophets, Major and Minor, are like so many signposts dotted throughout Old Testament history, all pointing to \_\_\_\_\_, to King David's greater Son, the Suffering Servant, the anointed Conqueror of His people's enemies and *"King of kings and Lord of lords"* (1 Tim. 6:15) to Whom all should submit in repentance, faith, and obedience.

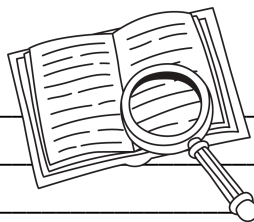
Quote:

*"As we go to the cradle only to find a baby, so we go to the Scriptures only to find Christ."  
—Martin Luther*

He was right—and the writings of the Minor Prophets lead us to Christ again and again.

Only in the light of the Old Testament can we properly understand the coming of Christ, and only through Christ can we properly understand the Old Testament.

## Questions to Ask:



## Extra Notes:

