



## Putting the Puzzle Pieces Together

Fifth Series: "The Left Edge" Old Testament: Prophets

Lesson 17: Minor Prophets

### I. Introduction

- A. Remember, their ministries emphasized 4 chronological points:
1. Their own day
  2. The captivity and return
  3. The first coming of Christ (i.e. Micah 5:2)
  4. The Messianic Kingdom (Joel 1:15; Zephaniah 1:7, etc.)
  5. "The chronology was not as important in their minds as the events themselves and they sometimes blurred the distinction between these 4 periods. Some events were literally fulfilled, some partially fulfilled and some are yet unfulfilled. Their messages use symbols and figures of speech but they point to real events."
- B. Their prophetic ministries cover a 400-year span of history through the Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian Empires
- C. Prophets to the Northern Kingdom (3): Jonah, Amos, Hosea  
Southern Kingdom (6): Obadiah, Joel, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah and Habakkuk  
Post-Exilic Prophets (3): Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi
- D. Their Order:

<u>Canonical Order</u>	<u>Chronological Order</u>	<u>Approximate Dates</u>
1. Hosea	1. Obadiah	840
2. Joel	2. Joel	835
3. Amos	3. Jonah	760
4. Obadiah	4. Amos	755
5. Jonah	5. Hosea	740
6. Micah	6. Micah	730
7. Nahum	7. Nahum	660
8. Habakkuk	8. Zephaniah	625
9. Zephaniah	9. Habakkuk	607
10. Haggai	10. Haggai	520
11. Zechariah	11. Zechariah	515
12. Malachi	12. Malachi	430

## II. Hosea

- A. **Background Material:** This is an unhappy story of Hosea and his faithless wife, Gomer. It is an illustration of God's love for Israel in spite of their spiritual adultery. Unconditional love is the theme. For Hosea it meant buying his adulterous wife back from the slave market. For Israel it meant a time of punishment followed by restitution.
- B. **The Author:** His name means "salvation." He seems very familiar with Israel (the Northern Kingdom).
- C. **The Date:** Compiled during the early years of Hezekiah
- D. **The Theme:** God's loyal love for Israel (and us!)
- E. **Special Notes:** Some have called this book the "second greatest story in the Bible." The key verses are Chapter 3:1-5.

## III. Joel

- A. **Background Material:** Joel prophesied in Judah in the exciting and pivotal days of Uzziah (792-740 BC). It was a time of unparalleled prosperity of Judah and Israel.
- B. **The Author:** Joel. His name means "Yahweh is God." He identifies himself as the son of Pethuel (his name means "Persuaded of God") and there are almost no other details about his life known. It is surmised that he lived in or near Jerusalem because he is so familiar with the temple and the city itself. Some believe that he was also a priest.
- C. **The Date:** It can not be dated with any certainty.
- D. **The Occasion:** There had been a terrible locust plague and it had ruined all the crops in Judah. The basic economy of the land was disrupted and all levels of society were affected. There was no grain for the grain offerings in the temple. The sacrificial offerings could not be made.  
  
Joel used the terribleness of the plague to warn the people of a great judgment to come.
- E. **The Theme:** Joel uses the basic tenet that God is sovereignly guiding the affairs of earthly history toward his preconceived final goal...see 1:15, 2:1-4, 18, 20, 3:1-21. God is sovereignly operative in all that comes to pass, directing all things to their appointed end.

## IV. Amos

- A. **Background Material:** Amos ministered after the time of Obadiah, Joel and Jonah and just before Hosea, Micah and Isaiah.  
  
Uzziah reigned over the Southern Kingdom and Jeroboam II was the capable king over the Northern Kingdom. Economic and military conditions were almost ideal for both countries. During these years, Assyria, Babylonia, Syria and Egypt were relatively weak.
- B. **The Author:**
  1. His name means "to live a burden, to carry"

2. He is from Tekoa in Judah (10-12 miles south of Jerusalem)
  3. He was a shepherd who also tended sycamore trees (1:1, 7:14)
  4. His knowledge of the wilderness often surfaces in this message (3:4-5, 12, 5:8, 19, 9:9)
- C. **The Date:** (Amos 1:1) Uzziah reigned from 767 to 739 BC. Jerboam II reigned from 782 to 753 BC. That leaves an overlap from 767 to 753 BC.
- D. **The Occasion:** Amos is prophesying during a time of national prosperity and optimism. In spite of their current favorable circumstances, Amos was trying to get people to see that God's judgment was at hand...a message they did not want to hear.
- E. **The Theme:** The coming doom of the Northern Kingdom..."Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" (4:12)
- F. **Special Note:** Eschatologically, Amos focuses on the judgment of God...only the last 5 verses offer a word of consolation and promise. Note: Seven times God declares: "I will send a fire" (1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14, 2:2, 5) as a symbol of judgment.

## V. Obadiah

- A. **Background Material:** Obadiah preaches against Edom
1. The history of Edom began with Jacob and Esau. Esau was given the name "Edom" – "Red" – because of the red stew for which he traded his birthright. Esau moved to the mountainous area of Seir and absorbed the Horites (the original inhabitants). See Genesis 36.
  2. Edom refused to allow Israel to pass through their land on the way to Canaan. See Numbers 20:14-21.
  3. The Edomites opposed Saul and were subjected by David. They fought against Jehosaphat, rebelled against Jehoram and conquered again by Amaziah. They regained their freedom under Ahaz and later controlled by both Assyria and Babylonians. Eventually, they moved to the area of Southern Palestine and became known as the Idumaeans. (Herod the Great was an Idumaeans.)
  4. Geography of Edom: Extends 100 miles southward from the Dead Sea to Elath on the Gulf of Agabah.
- B. **The Author:** Obadiah is an obscure prophet whose name means "worshipper or servant of God." Nothing is known about his hometown or family.
- C. **The Date:** It is the most difficult prophetic book to date. Commentators place it at 840 BC or 586 BC.
- D. **The Occasion:** The invasion of Jerusalem when Edom stands by as a mocking bystander. The fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC to the Babylonians is the most likely occasion in mind. Edom was clearly implicated in this invasion. See Jeremiah 27, 40, Ezekiel 25:12, Lamentations 2:15 – 17, 4:21.

## VI. Jonah

- A. **Background Material:** God instructs Jonah to go preach repentance to the wicked nation of Ninevah. Jonah should head east, he runs west (towards Tarshish).
- B. **The Author:** The son of Amittai, a prophet in the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (783-753 BC), from the town of Gath Hopher (3 miles north of Nazareth in Galilee). *“A Jewish tradition says that Jonah was the son of the widow Zarephath whom Elijah raised from the dead – 1 Kings 17:8-24”* (Talk Through the Bible, p. 256)
- C. **The Date:** Israel was enjoying a period of resurgence and prosperity. Nationalistic fervor was high. Assyria, on the other hand, was in a period of mild decline.
- D. **The Occasion:**
  - 1. As an allegory or parable (showing Israel’s narrow minded nationalism and exclusivism).
  - 2. As an historical account
    - a. Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jonah was regarded as history
    - b. Our Lord’s “stamp of approval” – see Matthew 12:38-41
- E. **The Theme:** More than any Old Testament book, Jonah reveals the universal concern for God for all men everywhere.

## VII. Micah

- A. **Background Material:** Consider the parallel of Micah with Isaiah.
 

Some consider Micah to be an Isaiah in miniature. Both address the same people and the same problems. Compare:

  - a. 1: 2    Isaiah 1:2
  - b. 1:9-16    Isaiah 10:28-32
  - c. 2:8-9    Isaiah 10:10-23
  - d. 2:13    Isaiah 52:12
- B. **The Author:** His name means “Who is like God?” His hometown is Moresheth Gath which is located 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem on the border of Judah and Philistia. He was a country boy (like Amos). He had a clear sense of calling...See 3:8.
- C. **The Date:** Micah prophesied in the days of Jotham (739-731), Ahaz (731-715) and Hezekiah (715-686). Most of his work is done in Judah, but he also addresses the Northern Kingdom of Israel and predicts the fall of Samaria (1:6). The majority of his ministry took place before the Assyrian captivity of 722 BC. He was the contemporary of Hosea in the Northern Kingdom, and of Isaiah in the court of Jerusalem.
- D. **The Theme:** Micah contrasts the injustice of God’s people with His righteousness and justice.
  - 1. 1:1-3:12 – Indicts Israel and Judah for specific sins

2. 4:1 – 5:15 – Prediction regarding the judgment that will come as a result of those sins
  3. 6:1 – 7:20 – A message of hope and consolation. True peace and justice will prevail only when Messiah reigns
- E. **Special Notes:** Micah is quoted in both the Old Testament and New Testament by others:
1. Micah 3:12 is quoted 100 years later in Jeremiah 26:18
  2. Micah 5:2 is quoted in Matthew 2:5-6 and John 7:42
  3. Micah 7:6 is quoted in Matthew 10:34-36, Mark 13:12 and Luke 12:53

### VIII. Nahum

- A. **Background Material:**
1. “In the 150 years since Jonah’s remarkable revival, the people of Ninevah had returned to their defiant, immoral ways. Nahum’s preaching is not a call to repentance (like Jonah’s), but a decree of death for an evil people who have “worn out” the patience of God.” (Talk through the Bible, p. 266)
  2. Babylon will so destroy the city that no trace will remain.
  3. The term “Nahum” means comfort or consolation and is a shortened form of “Nehemiah.” The destruction of the capital city of Assyria is a comfort to Israel.
- B. **The Author:** The prophet Nahum is called an Elkoshite (probably a city in Southern Judah).
- C. **Date:** The fall of Ninevah to the Babylonians in 612 BC is seen by Nahum as a future event. Note: Nahum 3:8-10 refers to the fall of Thebes as a recent event, so this book must be dated after 664 BC.
- D. **The Theme:** The retribution of God against the wickedness of Ninevah. 1:7-9, 3:5-7
- E. **Special Note:** There are no direct Messianic prophecies in Nahum, and there are no condemnations of Judah included. Nahum is not quoted in the New Testament.

### IX. Habakkuk

- A. **Background:** “Habakkuk ministers during the ‘death throes’ of the nation of Judah. Though repeatedly called to repentance, the nation stubbornly refuses to change her sinful ways. Habakkuk, knowing the hardheartedness of his countrymen, asks God how long this intolerable condition can continue. God replies that the Babylonians will be His chastening rod upon the nation.” (Talk through the Bible, p. 273)
- B. **The Author:** His name means to “embrace” and “cling.” He is a prophet that may have been connected with the temple worship in Jerusalem. We know nothing of his genealogy.
- C. **The Date:** Most likely in the early part of Jehoiakim’s reign (609 – 597 BC), probably approximately 607 BC just before the Babylonian invasion by Nebuchadnezzar.

- D. **The Theme:** In spite of appearances, God is still on the throne as the Lord of history and the ruler of nations.
- E. **Special Notes:** Unlike the other prophets who spoke for God to the people, Habakkuk spoke to God about His people.

## X. Zephaniah

- A. **Background Material:** Likely Zephaniah's preaching helped influence the revival during Josiah's reign.
- B. **The Author:** According to verse 1, Zephaniah traces his lineage back 4 generations to Hezekiah, making him the only prophet of royal descent. He was probably an inhabitant of Jerusalem (he was very familiar with the city – see 1:9-10, 3:1-7, etc.) His name means "Yahweh has hidden."
- C. **The Date:**
  - 1. 1:1 "In the days of Josiah son of Amos, King of Judah"
    - a. Josiah reigned from 640-609 BC
    - b. The destruction of Ninevah (took place in 612 BC) is still future, thus Zephaniah can be dated between 640 and 612 BC
  - 2. Zephaniah probably prophesied before Josiah's reforms. (The sins from the reigns of Manasseh and Amon still predominated.) See 2 Kings 23:4-25.
  - 3. Unfortunately, these reforms were "too little, too late."
- D. **The Theme:** In 1:1-3:8, the theme focuses on the Day of Judgment upon Judah and the surrounding nations.  
  
In 3:9-20, the other side of the Day of the Lord is highlighted: The day of blessing after the judgment is complete. It features the righteous remnant and the blessing on Jew and Gentile alike.
- E. **Special Notes:** Christ in Zephaniah: "Jesus alluded to Zephaniah on 2 occasions: Matthew 13:41 (Zephaniah 1:3) and Matthew 24:29 (Zephaniah 1:15).

## XI. Haggai

- A. **Background Information:** The Jews were back in the Land but were neglecting the rebuilding of the temple. The book is a series of messages meant to stir up the people to action.
- B. **The Author:** His name means "Festal One" (He apparently was born on some feast)
- C. **The Occasion:** Haggai was commissioned of the Lord to rouse the people to rebuild the temple - destroyed in 586 BC
- D. **The Theme:** Reconstruct the Temple (1:7-8, 2:7-9)
- E. **Special Notes:** There are 4 main addresses in the prophecy:

1. 1:1-15 Reproof and warning and then goes on to promise God's presence with Israel in the renewed work
2. 2:1-9 The glory of the temple foretold
3. 2:10-19 Haggai shows that their sins under their work. He sets for the principles of sin and holiness
4. 2:20-23 He predicts God's continued protection and blessing upon His people

## XII. Zechariah

- A. **Background Material:** The book is "The most Messianic, the most truly Apocalyptic and eschatological of all the writing of the Old Testament."
- B. **The Author:**
  1. His name means "God remembers" (same as 29 other Old Testament men)
  2. He was of priestly lineage
  3. He was born in Babylon – returned to Palestine with his grandfather under Zerubbabel and Joshua
  4. Matthew 23:35 says he was martyred in the same way as a previous Zechariah (see 2 Chron. 24:20-21)
- C. **The Theme:** Since the people had abandoned their work on the temple, "Zechariah is commissioned by God to encourage the people in their unfinished responsibility. Rather than exhorting them to action with strong words of rebuke, Zechariah seeks to encourage them to action by reminding them of the future importance of the temple. He reminds them that 'future blessing is contingent upon present obedience.'" (Talk through the Bible, p. 289) They are not just building, they are building a future.
- D. **Special Notes:** Christ is portrayed as both servant and king, man and God in Zechariah.

## XIII. Malachi

- A. **Background Material:** He is a prophet in the days of Nehemiah.
- B. **The Author:** Assumed to be Malachi but nothing else is known about him.
- C. **The Date:** Although an exact date cannot be established for Malachi, internal evidence can be used to deduce an approximate date. The Persian term for governor, *pechah* (1:8; cf. Neh. 5:14; Hag. 1:1, 14; 2:21) indicates that this book was written during the Persian domination of Israel (539-333 BC). Nehemiah returned to Persia in 432 BC, but came back to Palestine about 425 BC and dealt with the sins described in Malachi. It is therefore likely that Malachi proclaimed his message while Nehemiah was absent between 432 BC and 425 BC, almost a century after Haggai and Zechariah began to prophesy (520 BC).
- D. **The Theme:** Malachi clearly predicts the coming of the forerunner who will clear the way before the Lord. He also alludes to the Second Coming of Christ (3:2-5)

**E. Special Notes:**

1. “The structure is built upon a recurring pattern of accusation (i.e. “You are robbing me!”), interrogation (i.e. “How have we robbed thee?”), and refutation (i.e. “In tithes and offerings”). Also note of the 55 verses in this book, 47 are spoken by God.
2. Malachi is the only prophet who ends his book with judgment. Even the more intense prophecies of Joel and Zephaniah end on a theme of whole and future blessing.

**XIV. So what?**

Each book is worthy of individual, detailed study. There is a spiritual “gold mine” in each of those 12 books!

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Which minor prophet do you know the most about? Which one do you enjoy reading most? Why?
2. Why do you think the prophetic books are neglected?
3. Can you commit to a detailed study of 1 minor prophet? When?