
Contents

Introduction	4
1. The Twelve Minor Prophets	7
JONAH	
2. Background and Survey of Jonah	20
3. Jonah Runs from God	28
4. Jonah Preaches to Nineveh	37
AMOS	
5. Background and Survey of Amos	45
6. The Nations' Transgressions	55
7. Judgments Against Israel	63
8. The Final Restoration	74
HOSEA	
9. Background and Survey of Hosea	78
10. Hosea and His Unfaithful Wife	86
11. Hosea and Wife Reunited	92
12. Sin Brings Judgment	98
13. Hope for Backsliders	104
Bibliography	108

Lesson 1

The Twelve Minor Prophets

The best way to begin studying the minor prophets is to learn about their original writings. These books were not written in a vacuum—there were urgent situations in the lives of God’s people with which He wanted to deal. And so at various times God called upon certain of His prophets to deliver the “Thus saith the Lord” to His people. In this lesson we will spend most of our time studying the general setting of *all* Old Testament prophecy as we relate the minor prophets to this.

I. THE TWELVE MINOR PROPHETS

Young children memorizing the books of the Old Testament usually have an exciting time when they reach the minor prophets, because the pronunciations and rhythms are such a challenge for recitation. This is the list:

- | | |
|------------|---------------|
| 1. Hosea | 7. Nahum |
| 2. Joel | 8. Habakkuk |
| 3. Amos | 9. Zephaniah |
| 4. Obadiah | 10. Haggai |
| 5. Jonah | 11. Zechariah |
| 6. Micah | 12. Malachi |

A. Titles

The common title for these books is “minor prophets.” This title originated in Augustine’s time (late fourth century A.D.). The books are “minor” only in the sense of being much shorter than such prophecies as Isaiah and Jeremiah (called “major prophets”). Their message is surely not less important today, nor was it when

first delivered in Old Testament times. They were minor prophets preaching a major message.

The Hebrew Bible regards these writings as one book and calls them simply “The Twelve.” It was because of the books’ brevity that the Jews in Old Testament times joined the twelve writings together into one scroll, so that the combined length was about the same as that of Isaiah or Jeremiah. Hence it was natural to consider them as one book, *The Twelve*.¹ At least the title is not misleading, as “minor prophets” can be.

B. Canon

The twelve minor prophets have never been strongly challenged as being part of the inspired canon of Scripture. Their messages are just as lofty and unique as those of the major prophets and have been recognized as such.

As noted above, in the Hebrew Bible (Law, Prophets, Writings) *The Twelve* is listed as just one book of the Prophets section. This partly explains why the Hebrew Bible has a total of only twenty-four books, although those twenty-four are the exact equivalent of our thirty-nine. In the English Bible the minor prophets compose twelve of the seventeen prophetic books.

C. Order of the List

Read again the list of the minor prophets given earlier in the lesson. It is not fully known what originally determined the order of this list. There is a general chronological pattern, in that the first six books were written before the last six. This observation is based on the order of prophets as shown on Chart B.

II. WHY PROPHETS?

A. A Prophet's Ministry

The ministry of prophet is an important one in the Bible. This is shown by the fact that the word “prophet” in its various forms appears more than 660 times in the Bible, two-thirds of which are in the Old Testament. The sixteen prophets who wrote the seventeen Old Testament prophetic books² lived over a span of about

1. The following second-century B.C. nonbiblical reference shows that the books were so designated before the time of Christ: “And of the Twelve Prophets may the bones flourish again from their place, for they comforted Jacob and redeemed them by assurance of hope” (Ecclesiasticus 49:10).
2. Jeremiah wrote two of the seventeen books: Jeremiah and Lamentations.

420 years. We may well ask, “Why did God raise up prophets in Old Testament times?” To answer this, we need to know what the prophetic ministry was. Gleason Archer says that the prophet (Heb., *nabi*) was “one called by God to proclaim as a herald from the court of heaven the message to be transmitted from God to man.”³ He was a combination preacher, herald, teacher, spokesman, intercessor, reformer, and even shepherd (Isa. 40:1-2). The prophet was also the moral conscience of the people, exposing and rebuking their sins (Isa. 58:1; Ezek. 22:2; 43:10; Mic. 3:8).

A prophet was primarily a spokesman for God. In Exodus 7:1 Aaron, Moses’ brother, is called a prophet (the same Hebrew word *nabi* cited above). Read Exodus 4:14-16 and note how Aaron was to speak in behalf of God. Also read Jeremiah 1:4-10 to see what was involved in the typical divine commission of a prophet.

The message that the prophets delivered from God to the people involved the past, the present, or the future. If it was past or present, the prophet was *forthtelling*. If it was future, he was *foretelling*. It is interesting that we usually identify the future with prophecy, but most of the prophets’ messages were of the forth-telling kind (e.g., teaching and rebuking).

All the prophetic words of the Old Testament could probably be compiled under the following four large areas of truth:

1. *Instruction of the great truths about God and man.* The prophets devoted much time telling the people about God—His character, His domain, His purpose, and His law. They also gave a true diagnosis of the spiritual health of the nations as a whole and of individual souls.

2. *Warning and appeal to those living in sin.* It cannot be said that God brings judgment upon men without forewarning. Over and over again the prophets warned of righteous judgment for sin, and exhorted the people to repent and turn to God.

3. *Comfort and exhortation to those trusting and obeying God.* These are the warm and bright portions of the prophets’ messages.

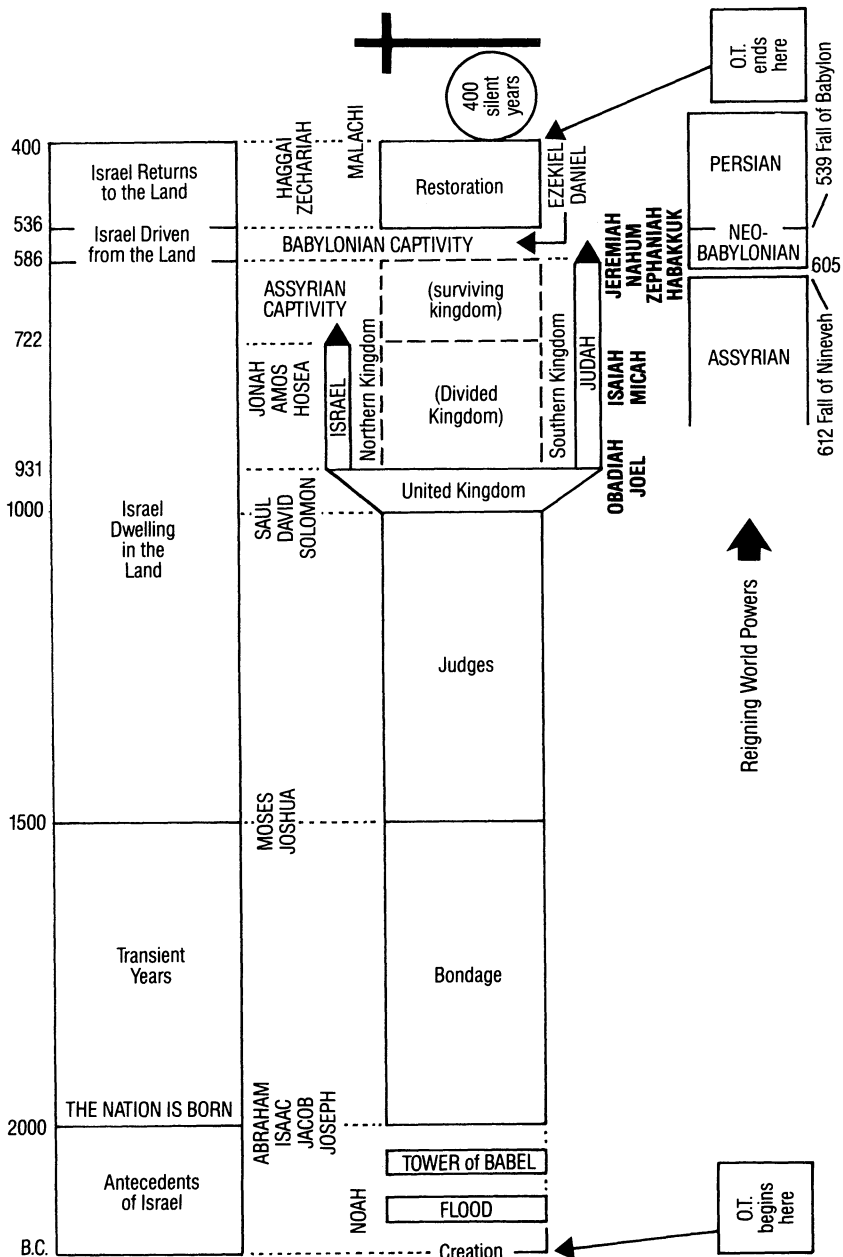
4. *Prediction of events to come.* Prophetic predictions were of two major subjects: (a) national and international events, of both near and far-distant future; and (b) the comings of Jesus the Messiah—His first and second.

So an answer to the question, “Why prophets?” would be that God wanted them to be channels of revelation to man about Him-

3. Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 284. In the New Testament there are mainly two different Greek words translated by the one English word “preach.” They are *evangelizo* (“preach the good news,” e.g., Luke 4:43), and *kerusso* (“proclaim,” e.g., Matt. 10:27). The latter word is similar to the Hebrew root of *nabi*.

THE WRITING PROPHETS IN OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

Chart A



self and His will, to lead them into a vital relationship with Himself.

B. A Prophet's Audience

We have looked briefly at *what* the ministry of an Old Testament prophet was. Now let us focus on the *who*. In particular, who was the audience of the prophet?

1. First, study Chart A carefully to get an overall view of Old Testament history. Note the following:

(a) The chosen nation of Israel came into being during the lifetime of Abraham, around 2000 B.C. (Memorize the time periods on the chart, and you will find that the many details of Old Testament history will fall into place.)

(b) Then followed a period of bondage (in Egypt) and of judges (in Canaan).

(c) A united kingdom arose in 1000 B.C. The people had demanded of God a king like those of pagan nations, to replace the judges (1 Sam. 8:4-9).

(d) The kingdom was officially split in 931 B.C.⁴ The ten tribes living in the north (New Testament areas of Samaria and Galilee) seceded from the south and retained the name *Israel*. They are referred to as the Northern Kingdom. Their rivals were the two tribes living in south Canaan, known as the Southern Kingdom, or Judah.

(e) Then came the captivities. God judged Israel's sins by allowing Assyria to conquer it in 722 B.C. Judah fell to the Babylonians in 586 B.C., for the same reason.

(f) At last there was restoration. After a period of captivity, the Jews in exile (Babylon and Assyria) returned to Jerusalem and Canaan in an attempt to restore their religion. (The historical reporting of this return is by Ezra and Nehemiah.)

(g) The writing of Malachi, around 400 B.C., is the last date of Old Testament writing.

(h) Three world powers reigned during the years of the prophets: Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, and Persian. Much of the prophets' message was about Gentile nations; some of it was even directed to them (e.g., Jonah).

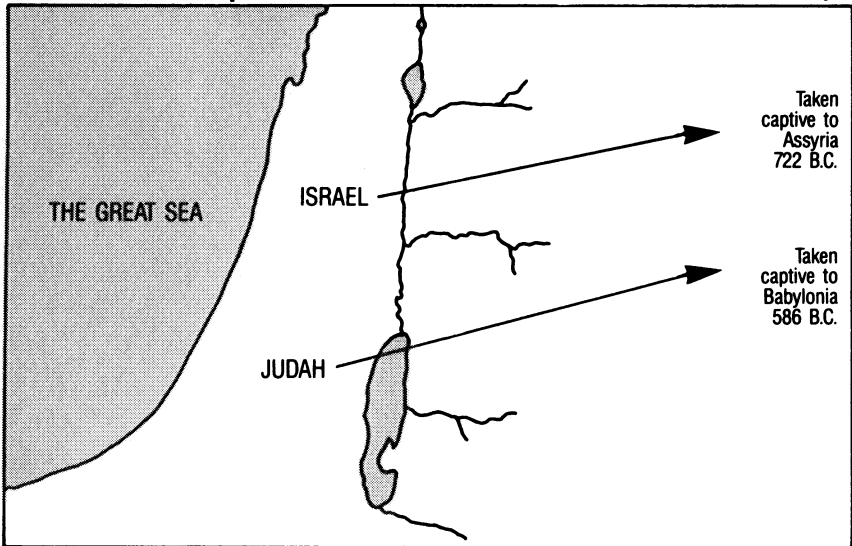
2. Picture the land areas involved in the historical events noted above. This is shown on Map 1, Audience of the Prophets.

3. Observe on Chart A the sixteen names of prophets who were biblical authors. Note when they lived and what phase of

4. A rift had begun to form earlier than this date. Read 1 Sam. 11:8; 15:4; and 18:6, where a distinction is made between Israel and Judah.

Audience of the Prophets

Map 1



Jewish history their ministry was related to. Note, for example, that Jonah, Amos, and Hosea, in that chronological order, were prophets of Israel.⁵ Actually, Jonah is different from the other two in that while he was a prophet within the commonwealth of Israel, his ministry described in the book was directed to a foreign nation, not to Israel. The prophets Jonah, Amos, and Hosea are the ones studied in this manual.

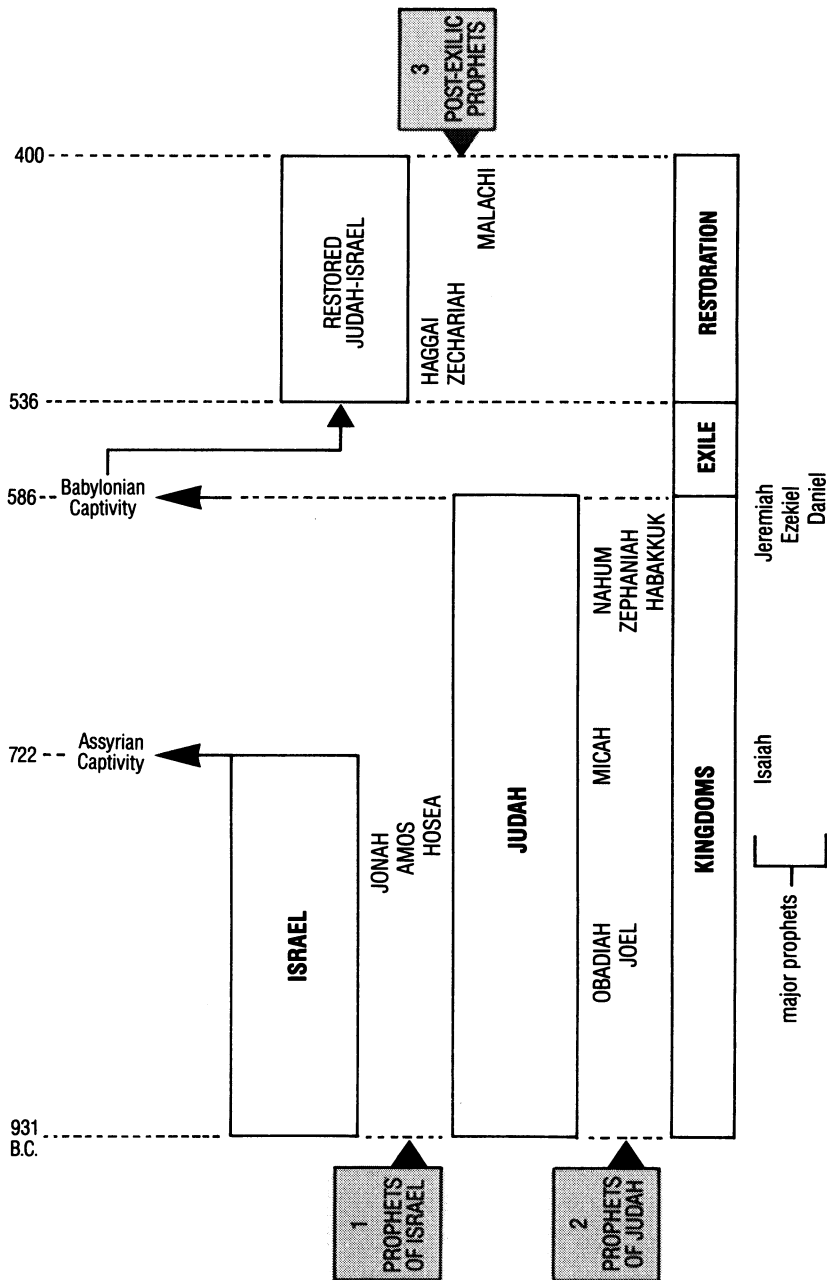
4. Chart B shows the three groups of minor prophets: (1) prophets of Israel, (2) prophets of Judah, and (3) post-exilic prophets. These are the groups studied in the three books of this self-study series on the minor prophets.

5. With the above historical setting in mind, think about the spiritual condition of God's people—the usual audience of the prophets. Wicked kings led multitudes of people into idolatry and all forms of disobedience to God. Periods of prosperity in the land of Canaan lured the people to a spirit of apathy and pleasure-seeking. Intermarriage with pagans broke down the institution of the home. Apostasy of the religious leaders meant neglect and eventual rejection of the Scriptures and true worship. People rebelled against God, but His long-suffering endured. Through the

5. Most of the dates of the prophets and rulers cited in this manual are those shown on John C. Whitcomb's study-graph, *Chart of Old Testament Kings and Prophets* (Chicago: Moody, 1968). The names of the sixteen prophets noted above appear on Chart B.

Chart B

THREE GROUPS OF MINOR PROPHETS



voice of the prophets, He sought to woo them to Himself. And the prophets were faithful to their calling. What they preached is recorded for us in the books of *The Twelve*.

III. MAIN SUBJECTS OF THE MINOR PROPHETS

F. W. Farrar calls the writings of the Hebrew prophets—minor as well as major—“the crown and flower of the Old Testament writings.”⁶ It is unfortunate therefore that many Christians overlook studying Old Testament prophecy. The setting is ancient, to be sure: God’s message to Israel and surrounding nations. But the applications of the principles are timeless and are therefore contemporary. Enhancing this is the imminency of fulfillment of end-times prophecies.

Let us look a little more at the content of the prophetic books.

A. Instruction and Exhortation (forthtelling)

Many chapters deal with sin, warning, and judgment, but they do so because that is the very setting of God’s good news of redemption. There is a positive, bright evangel in every book of *The Twelve*:

The irrepressible love of God to sinful men; the perseverance and pursuits of His grace; His mercies that follow the exile and outcast; His truth that goes forth richly upon the heathen; the hope of the Saviour of mankind; the outpouring of the Spirit; counsels of patience; impulses of tenderness and of healing.⁷

B. Prediction and Exhortation (foretelling)

The utterances of the prophets, for the most part, centered on four points in history: (1) their own times, (2) the threatening captivities (Assyrian and Babylonian) and eventual restoration, (3) the coming of their Messiah,⁸ and (4) the reign of the Messiah as King.

6. F. W. Farrar, *The Minor Prophets* (New York: Randolph, n.d.), p. 21.

7. George Adam Smith, *The Book of The Twelve Prophets* (New York: Harper, n.d.), 1:9.

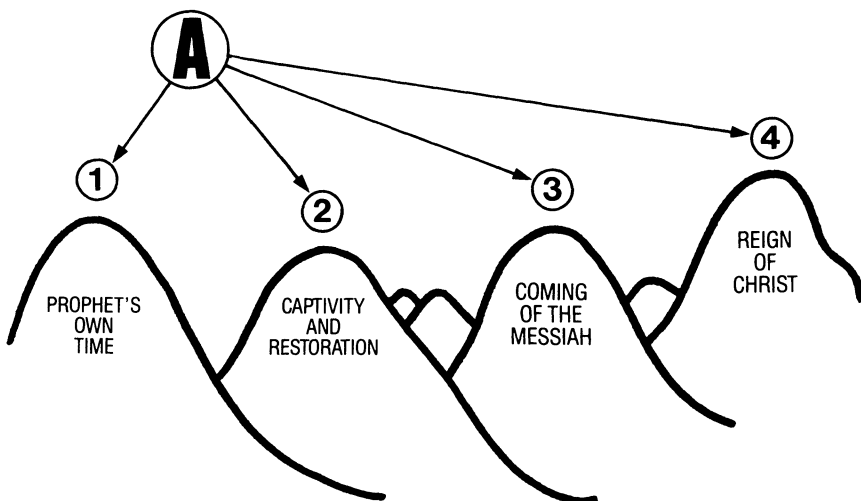
8. The name “Messiah” (lit., “anointed one”) appears only twice in the Old Testament: Dan. 9:25-26. The idea of an anointed person or thing, however, is common in the Old Testament. In 2 Sam. 7 the concept of a Davidic Messiah originates, without using either the word “Messiah” or “anointed.” In the prophets Christ is referred to by various names (e.g., “ruler,” Mic. 5:2).

1. *The Four Prophetic Points*

Look at the diagram of Chart C. The prophet is standing on some high point (A), looking off into the distance (the future) and writing what he sees. Most often he sees the sins prevailing in his day among his own people (1 on the chart). Then he sees the impending crucial events (2), when the nation would be taken out of its land into captivity and later regathered. At times the Spirit enables him to look further into the future and to foretell the coming of the Messiah, the anointed One (Christ, 3). Occasionally he sees the most distant event, when the Messiah as the Son of David will establish a kingdom of peace and glory on this earth (4).

FOUR PROPHETIC POINTS

Chart C



2. *The Two Messianic Themes*

When a prophet speaks of the coming Deliverer (Christ), he refers to Him in either of His two comings—either in the first coming as the suffering Messiah (e.g., Zech. 13:7) or in the second coming as the reigning Messiah (e.g., Zech. 14:9, 16). The prophets apparently were not aware that a long interval of time would transpire between Christ's manifestation in suffering (first advent, leading to the cross) and His revelation in glory (second advent, climaxing in

the crown). Christ's suffering and His reigning appeared to them to be very close in time.⁹

In order to understand what future event a prophet is writing about, the Bible student must observe carefully the language and the content of the prophet's prediction.¹⁰ This manual will give help in such studies as these.

IV. JONAH, AMOS, AND HOSEA

The three books to be studied in this manual are Jonah, Amos, and Hosea.¹¹ The groupings of the twelve minor prophets as shown of Chart D explain why these three are studied together. (Note: Within each group the books are listed in chronological order. See Chart B.)

THREE GROUPS OF THE TWELVE BOOKS

Chart D

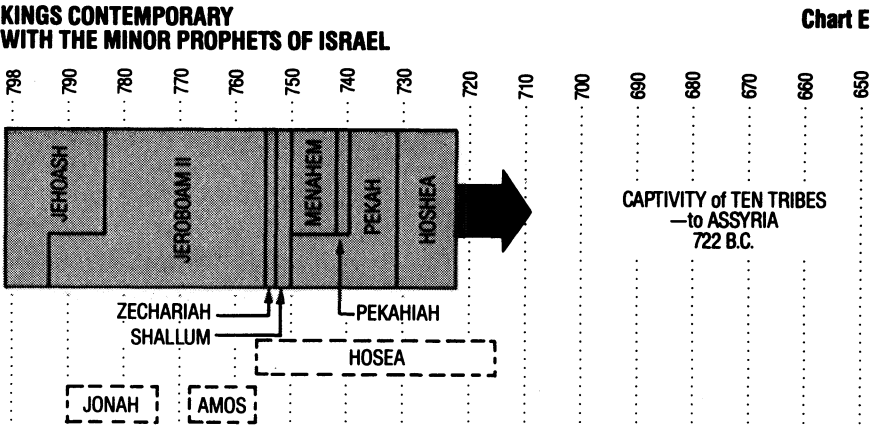
GROUP	BOOK	NO. of CHAPS.	TOTAL NO. of CHAPS.
① PROPHETS of ISRAEL	Jonah	4	27
	Amos	9	
	Hosea	14	
② PROPHETS of JUDAH	Obadiah	1	20
	Joel	3	
	Micah	7	
	Nahum	3	
	Habakkuk	3	
	Zephaniah	3	
③ POST-EXILIC PROPHETS	Haggai	2	20
	Zechariah	14	
	Malachi	4	

9. The prophets themselves knew that the Spirit had not revealed *all* details to them. Read 1 Pet. 1:10-11; Col. 1:26-27 (cf. Dan. 12:8-9).

10. Sometimes a prophecy may have a *multiple* intention of fulfillment. Here is an example: A prophecy of restoration of the Jews may concern (1) return from Babylonian captivity *and* (2) the regathering of Israel from all parts of the world in the end times.

11. The other two manuals on the minor prophets in this self-study series treat the second and third groups shown on Chart D.

Chart E shows which kings were reigning in Israel during the public ministries of each of the three prophets.¹² In a few instances there were co-regencies (e.g., both Jehoash and Jeroboam II ruled between 793 and 782). How many kings reigned during Hosea's ministry? Note that the Assyrians took Israel captive toward the close of Hosea's ministry. Since the captivity was God's judgment for sin, what does this reveal about the spiritual burden on Hosea's shoulders?



Below are listed the approximate dates of the reigns of Israel's kings and ministries of its prophets between 798 and 713 B.C.

Reigns of the Kings		Ministries of the Prophets	
Jehoash	798-782	Jonah	784-722
Jeroboam II	793-753		
Zechariah	753-752		
Shallum	752	Amos	765-755
Menahem	752-742	Hosea	755-713
Pekahiah	742-740		
Pekah	752-732		
Hoshea	732-722		

V. NEW TESTAMENT QUOTES OF JONAH, AMOS, AND HOSEA

It is significant that the minor prophets are more frequently quoted than the major prophets in the New Testament. This con-

12. As noted earlier, Jonah's ministry was directed to a foreign power, Assyria. See "Chart of Kings and Prophets," in the self-study guide of 1 Kings, pp. 110-11, for a survey of all the kings and prophets of Israel and Judah.

firmes the observation noted earlier that the word “minor” does not suggest that the minor prophets preached a less important message than the major prophets.

Below is a list of quotes or allusions to Jonah, Amos, and Hosea as found in the New Testament. Read each of the Old Testament passages and its quote, and record the subject in a few words. (Note: In the case of Jonah, no verse is quoted. Rather, the story itself is recognized by the New Testament text.)

O. T. passage	N. T. quote	Subject
(The story of Jonah)	Matt. 16:4 Luke 11:30 Matt. 12:39-41	
Amos 9:11-12	Acts 15:16-17	
Hosea 1:9-10; 2:23 10:8 11:1 6:2 13:14 6:6	Rom. 9:25; 1 Pet. 2:10 Luke 23:30 Matt. 2:15 1 Cor. 15:4 1 Cor. 15:55 Matt. 9:13; 12:7	

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Name the twelve minor prophets in the order given in our English Bible.
2. Name the minor prophets according to the three groups given in this lesson.
3. What does the title “minor prophets” signify?
4. What group name does the Hebrew Bible assign to these books?
5. What were some of the main ministries of prophets in Old Testament times? Distinguish between oral and writing prophets.
6. During what era of Jewish history did the writing prophets serve?
7. Who was the reigning world power during the ministries of Jonah, Amos, and Hosea?

8. Distinguish between forthtelling and foretelling, as far as the prophets were concerned. Which of these two was their writing mostly about?

9. What are the four prophetic points that appear in the prophets' messages?

10. What are the two different kinds of predictions concerning the coming of the Messiah?

* * *

The three prophets of Israel have been compared this way:

Jonah: prophet of a broken ministry

Amos: prophet of the broken law

Hosea: prophet of a broken heart

These comparisons suggest in a limited way something of the paths that your studies will follow as you move from book to book in this manual. Ask the Holy Spirit to be your Teacher, Guide, and Inspirer that you may grow stronger as a Christian by studying these words of God.