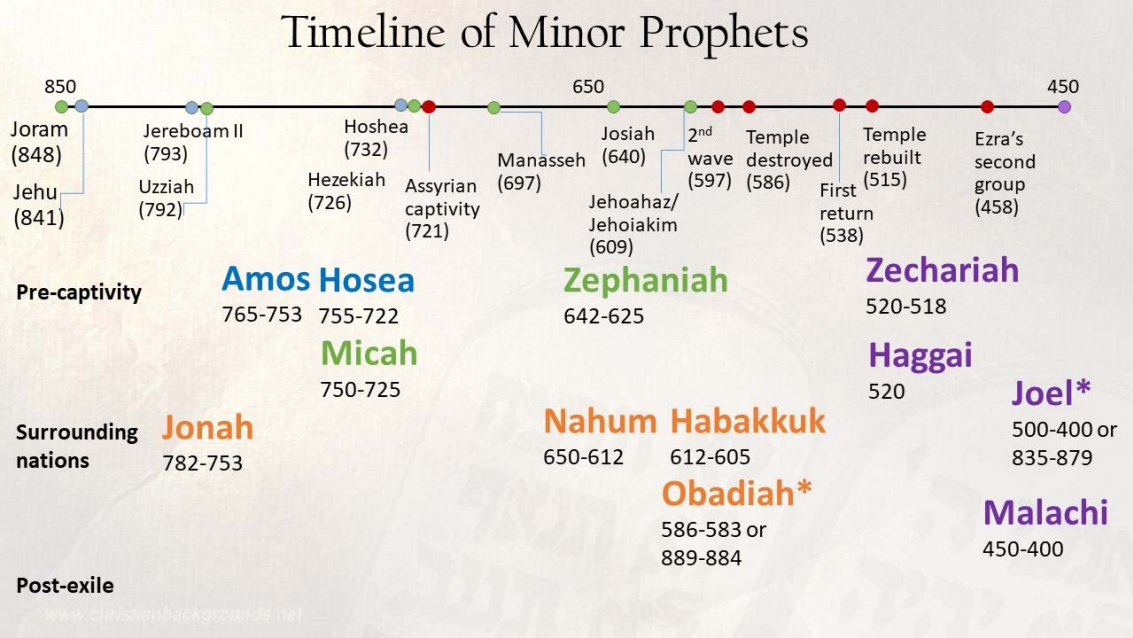
Jesus in the Minor Prophets

1. Introduction

a. Despite their name, the "Minor" Prophets have no less importance or significance than the major prophets. They are called minor because of their relatively short length. They span a time period of around 450 years during the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions and the exile into Babylon and like the major prophets they contain messages of warnings to God's people, calling them to repent of their idolatry, of their sinfulness, and their injustice.



b. The book themes range from the initial condemnation of both Israel and Judah for their wickedness, to encouragements for them to worship with their whole hearts and not hypocritically, to predictions of the coming Messiah, which were fulfilled in the New Testament by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

c. Prophets had a primary mission of revealing the message of God to the people – they did not always predict future events beyond the coming judgment of the nation. But the books do include an amazing number of prophecies fulfilled hundreds of years later, both in the documented events of the Old Testament, and the actions of Jesus in the New. In addition, many statements gain deeper meaning in light of the full revelation of God's plan of salvation.

d. Since much of their content carries similar messages to the major prophets we are not going to look at them book by book. Instead I want to consider six ways in which the minor prophets foreshadow the glory of Jesus.

e. These final twelve books of the Old Testament have strange names and often use poetic language to introduce people and stories that are literally thousands of years old. But when we read the Minor Prophets to know Jesus better, and enjoy him more deeply, we see his glory afresh in at least six ways.

2. The character of Christ

a. We see the manifold character of God that Jesus displays in his incarnation. God reveals himself as a jealous husband whose people have committed adultery with other gods (Hosea 1–3). Hosea is all about Jesus – the faithful bridegroom who will jealously pursue his Bride.

b. In Hosea the covenant between God and Israel initiated at Sinai is shown as a marriage. This analogy sees all the indictments of Israel's idolatry as spiritual adultery. In addition, when God promises to save his people after he judges them (Hos. 2), he depicts their future salvation as a new marriage ceremony at a new Sinai (cf. esp. Hos. 2:14–23).

c. Jesus later came calling himself the bridegroom of God's people (e.g., Matt. 9:15), and Paul strikingly states that the great mystery of marriage "refers to Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:32). Jesus comes to initiate the new covenant, which is like the new betrothal prophesied in Hosea 2:14–23 (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2), and it will culminate in "the marriage of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:7), when "the Bride, the wife of the Lamb," comes "down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God" (Rev. 21:9–11).

d. Hosea also prophesies of the sinful nation of Israel being struck down by Yahweh, who comes at them like a lion (Hos. 5:14). But, with striking echoes of future salvation events, the prophet says that this death of the nation will happen when the people are driven into exile. Then, after the exile, Yahweh will raise his people from the dead on the third day (Hos. 6:2–3). Jesus is the Bridegroom of his redeemed people.

Mark 2:19–20 *And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.* ***20*** *The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day*

Ephesians 5:32 *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

e. Other minor prophets show us clearly that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. God's desire to show mercy runs all through the book of Jonah.

Jonah 4:2 *And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are <u>a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love</u>, and relenting from disaster*

a. However, where there is no repentance God will not clear the guilty

Nahum 1:2–3 *The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies.* ***3*** *The Lord is <u>slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty</u>. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.*

b. Jesus was the fullest embodiment of grace and truth (John 1:16–18), while at the same time being the righteous Judge who will execute God's wrath (Revelation 19:11–21).

3. The horror of the sin for which Jesus died

a. We see the horrible depths of the sin that Jesus dies for on the cross. Often in graphic detail, the Minor Prophets describe the many different ways sin manifests itself, such as spiritual adultery (Hosea 2:1–13), idolatry (Hosea 4:10–19), mistreating others (Amos 1:2–2:16; Micah 2:1–3:12), racism (Jonah 1:1–6; 4:1–11), and impurity (Malachi 1:6–14).

b. We see the same sins in the world today and in our own hearts, exposing our need for Jesus. Our sin is of no less magnitude than those of pre-exilic Israel.

Ephesians 2:1–3 *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins* **2** *in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—* **3** *among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

4. A real day when Jesus will judge the world.

a. We see the awful judgment that Jesus bears on the cross for his people. The Minor Prophets repeatedly refer to the coming Day of the Lord, when God will execute judgment on his enemies (Joel 1:2–2:11; Obadiah 1–16; Zephaniah 1:2–18). The judgment threatened for Israel and the surrounding nations anticipates the final judgment on all humanity on the last day.

Acts 17:30–31 *The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,* 31 *because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.*

b. It is this judgment for the sin of his people that Jesus took upon himself at the cross. It is only through the cross of Christ that we can be saved from the wrath of God poured out when Jesus comes to judge the earth.

5. Recognize the King of kings.

a. We see descriptions of the righteous king that Jesus fulfils. Unlike the unfaithful kings who ruled over Israel and Judah, God promises a king from David's line who will establish peace and rule over God's people as a shepherd.

Micah 5:2–5 *But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.* **3** *Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labour has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel.*

b. His reign will extend to all nations and transform creation itself

Amos 9:11–15 *"In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old,* 12 *that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name," declares the Lord who does this.....* 14 *I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall*

make gardens and eat their fruit [15] I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them,"says the Lord your God.

Zechariah 9:9 *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

Zechariah 14:9 *And the Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day the Lord will be one and his name one.*

c. As the true son of David (Matthew 1:1), Jesus has become our peace (Ephesians 2:14) and rules over his people as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11–18). He sits at the right hand of the Father (Hebrews 1:1–13), awaiting the day when he will transform creation (Revelation 21–22).

6. Appreciate the beauty and cost of our salvation.

a. We see stunning promises of the salvation that Jesus accomplishes. Because God is compassionate, he promises he will tread our iniquities underfoot and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea

Micah 7:18–20 *Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger for ever, because he delights in steadfast love. [19] He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. [20] You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.*

b. As "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29, 35–36), Jesus "bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24).

7. We have Jesus's Spirit living in us.

a. We see glorious promises of the Spirit that Jesus pours out on his people. As part of redeeming his people, God promises to pour out his Spirit on all his people, regardless of their gender or social status

Joel 2:28–32 *"And it shall come to pass afterwards, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. **[29]** Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. **[30]** "And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. **[31]** The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. **[32]** And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls.*

b. As the risen and exalted Lord, Jesus pours out the Spirit on his people to empower us to live holy lives and bear witness to him as we await and prepare for the great and awesome day of the Lord.

8. Our response to these prophecies

a. As we see Jesus in the Minor Prophets:

i Our hearts are stirred with fresh wonder that he took on flesh and dwelled among us.

ii We see the depths of our own sin and our hearts are prompted to confess and turn away from them.

iii We see the awful judgment that our sin deserves and that Jesus experienced in our place and our hearts are moved with gratitude.

iv We meet the all-powerful, perfectly righteous King of kings, we tremble at his holiness and authority, and submit ourselves totally to his lordship.

v We see the promises of salvation that we now experience through the work of Jesus and our hearts are filled with greater joy and assurance.

vi We see the promises of the Spirit, that same Spirit witnesses to our hearts that we are children of God and heirs of an eternal inheritance.

9. The final words

a. The final book of the Old Testament is the prophecy of Malachi – the final words from God before 400 years of silence. In the days of Malachi, many of God's people had taken His covenant lightly or even rejected it. They wondered where the God of justice had gone and why He seemed so distant.

b. In fact, the prophet says they had wearied God by asking where He was (2:17). So Malachi prophesied that a messenger was coming to prepare the way of the Lord—generally mentioned in 3:1, but identified as an Elijah-like figure in 4:5-6—and that the Lord Himself would suddenly come to His temple. The God they were looking for would appear.

Malachi 4:5-6 *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. **6** And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."*

c. John the Baptist fulfilled the role of the one who prepares the way; numerous New Testament passages say so, including many spoken by Jesus Himself. But the messenger of the covenant is Jesus—the Lord whom they sought. He suddenly came to His temple, figuratively and literally, and He came with a passion to cleanse.

d. That ought to tell us something about the Messiah's purpose in our lives. He loves us and accepts us as we are, but He loves us too much to leave us where we are. He's not interested in seeing us conform externally to some kind of religious code. He wants us to have hearts of integrity, filled with a passionate desire to love and serve Him.

e. He wants to cleanse us of double-mindedness, deception, injustice, and selfishness. He wants to birth in us attitudes and characteristics that reflect His nature. He wants to live in intimate relationship with us. Why? Because that's why we were created—for fellowship with Him. We were made for relationship with the living God. Sin and

corruption prevent that. So our gracious Lord, when He suddenly comes to His temple, comes to purify us. He wants us.

f. These twelve short books are a treasure trove of revelation of the character of Jesus, our Bridegroom, King and Judge. In fact, the whole of the Old Testament, as we have seen, speaks of this coming Saviour.

10. Conclusion

a. The Babylonian exile was the darkest time in Israel's history. It seemed as if they had lost all the promises made to their forefathers. However, through the voice of the prophets God made clear his future plan for their, and our, salvation.

b. Captivity and initial hopelessness gave way to another message from God—this time not about judgment but about restoration. The prophets during and after the exile saw good things ahead, and they were even greater than the people imagined.

c. For those who trust in the saving work of Jesus the gospel of the Kingdom is that, , we can know full restoration and an eternal future under the glorious rule of King Jesus. This is our message of good news to a world which is full of hopelessness and despair. As the prophets of old we carry a message of hope to a dark and futile world.

Romans 15:13 *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*