

An Introduction to the Minor Prophets

In order for us to better understand the Minor Prophets we will answer two introductory questions about these men and their message. The first question we will consider is “Why are the Minor Prophets ‘minor’?” The second question we will ponder is “What makes the Minor Prophets grand?” Then we will attempt to encapsulate the ethos of the Minor Prophets that still challenge us today.

1. Why are the Minor Prophets “Minor”?

The twelve Minor Prophets served the Lord over a span of nearly 400 years. Before we learn why they are “minor,” here are two reasons they are *not* minor in the sense of unimportant.

First, they are not minor in the sense of unimportant because of an insignificant message! While the distinction is made between Major Prophets and Minor Prophets, we should not conclude that Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel had something major or important to say while the Minor Prophets had something minor or unimportant to say. It’s not like major and minor leagues. This would be a bad analogy.

Second, they are not minor in the sense of unimportant because of an irrelevant message! The prophet was “a herald of God at some crisis in the life or the conduct of [God’s] people. His message is never out of touch with events” (Smith, *The Minor Prophets*, 13).

The Minor Prophets are minor because of the brevity of their writings. Their message was powerful but concise.

2. What makes the Minor Prophets Grand?

The prophets allowed no dichotomy between private and professional spheres. They were called to sharpen the conscience of an ethically dull nation (Micah 3:8; 7:3; cf. Jeremiah 2:9).

The Minor Prophets are grand because of their prophetic timeliness. The idea of “prophetic untimeliness” is that “independent thinkers would always be out of step with the conventional wisdom of their generation” (Guinness, *Prophetic Untimeliness*, 19). The Minor Prophets were dissatisfied with the status quo of the nation.

There are at least five aspects to this prophetic timeliness.

A. *In a day when the world’s events were uncertain and their meaning difficult to comprehend, the Minor Prophets remind us that God is sovereign.*

The providence of God was front and center in the message of the prophets. “Nothing is more central to the thinking of these twelve writers than the fact that God is the sovereign Lord of history and that nothing happens, either to Israel or Gentile nations, that is not the direct result of His direct determination” (Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, 1:9; Habakkuk 1:5; Amos 3:6-7; cf.

Isaiah 45:7). The prophets remind us that there is a God in the heavens who does what He pleases for the purposes of His glory (Psalm 115:3; Isaiah 48:11).

- B. *In a day when there was a famine of God's word, the Minor Prophets remind us that God still speaks.*

Each one of these twelve books begin with the phrase, "The word of the LORD that came to . . ." (Hosea, Joel, Jonah, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) or "Thus says the LORD" (Amos 1:3, Obadiah 1:1, Nahum 1:12). "Thus says the LORD" is used no fewer than 41 times in these twelve books (Amos: 4; Obadiah: 1; Micah: 2; Nahum: 1; Haggai: 5; Zechariah: 18).

- C. *In a day of great unfaithfulness, the Minor Prophets remind us of God's faithfulness.*
The name Yahweh, LORD, in the OT denotes God as a covenant-keeping God. He faithfully kept His promises to the Nation.

- D. *In a day of empty liturgies and spurious faith, the Minor Prophets call us to have genuine religion.*
They called on Israel to have genuine religion because it was filled with empty liturgies and spurious faith. "They did not just preach the law, but called on Israel to obey the law, warning them of certain judgment if they refused. This is probably the primary function of the prophet" (Benware, *Survey of the Old Testament*, 192).

- E. *In a day of minimal commitment, the Minor Prophets remind us that a life set apart for God is a life best spent.*
They were men who were set apart for God's use (e.g., Amos 7:14). These men were patriots who loved their people and land (Amos 7:1-6; Habakkuk 1:13). They were not sheltered from the judgment about which they spoke (cf. Habakkuk 3:2, 16).

So in an attempt to capture the ethos of the Minor Prophets that challenge us today, here is how I'd summarize it.

- The Minor Prophets challenge us to gain a prophetic vision; to see the world as God sees it. We see and hear things that are imperceptible to a dull people.
- The Minor Prophets challenge us to deliver a prophetic message. "Thus says the LORD" should underpin all that we say and how we process life: our marriages, our parenting, our relationships, our sin, and our witness.
- The Minor Prophets challenge us to have prophetic courage. They help us not to be carried away by our cultural current. We do not have to assimilate!
- The Minor Prophets challenge us to have prophetic genuineness. These were not pretentious men. They were yielded to God. They heard and obeyed God's word, regardless of the reasons they could have used to say "I can't." Too often we are quick to give reasons why our service to God is limited.
- The Minor Prophets challenge us to possess a prophetic faith. This faith realizes that God is Creator and Lord. This faith holds on to promises when we are surrounded by prosperity and moral decay at the same time. It holds tenaciously to a view of God that says He is in control (Habakkuk 3:17-18).