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The Book of Jonah



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To my wife Caterina

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The Minor Prophets An Introduction

From very early days twelve smaller Hebrew prophetic writings are fondly united in one collection. In the Hebrew Bible this unified collection is positioned after the Book of Ezekiel¹. The Book of the Twelve is the eighth component in the division of the Hebrew Bible known as the *Nebhi'im* (“Prophets”). The first four of these books — Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings — are known as the Former Prophets. The last four — Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve — are called the Latter Prophets.

Phenomenology of the Twelve

The constituent books in the Twelve are broken down into sixtyseven chapters, more than Isaiah (66 chapters), Jeremiah (52 chapters), or Ezekiel (48 chapters). The total number of 1.050 verses, however, is less than any one of the three Major Prophets.² By word count the Book of the Twelve is eighteen per cent smaller than Isaiah, the smallest of the three Major Prophets.³

¹ The Book of Daniel appears in the third division of the Hebrew Bible. Sometime after the time of Josephus, Daniel was relocated from its position among the prophets to its present location following the *Megilloth* (Ruth, Song, Koheleth, Lamentations and Esther).

² Total verses in Isaiah = 1.292; Jeremiah = 1.364; and Ezekiel = 1.273.

³ Total word count in the Book of the Twelve is 30.305. Word counts the three Major Prophets are: Isaiah = 37.044; Jeremiah = 42.659; and Ezekiel = 39.047.

Chart No. 1

The Minor Prophets by Size

	Books	Chapters	Verses	Words
1.	Zechariah	14	211	6.444
2.	Hosea	14	197	5.175
3.	Amos	9	197	4.217
4.	Micah	7	105	3.153
5.	Joel	3	73	2.034
6.	Malachi	4	55	1.782
7.	Zephaniah	3	53	1.617
8.	Habakkuk	3	56	1.476
9.	Jonah	4	48	1.321
10.	Nahum	3	47	1.285
11.	Haggai	2	38	1.131
12.	Obadiah	1	21	670
		<hr/>		
		67	1.050	30.305

Chronology of the Twelve

Two chronological issues need to be discussed by way of introduction to the Book of the Twelve. The first is the chronology of the individual writings, and the second is the chronology of the collection.

A. Chronology of the Books

The Individual Books were produced in widely different periods of time. Among these books are some of the earliest and some of the latest of the Old Testament prophetic writings. In neither the Hebrew nor Greek arrangement of the books within the collection have strict chronological considerations being followed.

The twelve books come from four different periods. The earliest — Obadiah, Joel and Jonah — appeared in the late ninth and eighth centuries. This was the period prior to the rise of the great Assyrian empire. For that reason these three are sometimes called the pre-Assyrian prophets. The second three — Amos, Hosea, Micah — come from the eighth century, the period when the Assyrian armies were dominating the scene in the ancient Near East. The third triad — Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk — comes from the seventh century, when the power of the Assyrian empire faded rapidly and then was eclipsed by Babylon. The last three — Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi — come from the period after the exile when Judea was a province of the Persian Empire.

Were the books to be arranged in the order they were written, the Book of the Twelve might look like this:

Obadiah	845 BC	Nahum	650 BC
Joel	835 BC	Zephaniah	630 BC
Jonah	755 BC	Habakkuk	609 BC
Amos	752 BC	Haggai	520 BC
Micah	735 BC	Zechariah	480 BC
Hosea	725 BC ⁴	Malachi	432 BC

⁴ Hosea's ministry began before that of Micah and extended beyond it. Thus the Book of Micah would have been written before Ho-

The prophetic literature in the Old Testament began to be produced in the days when the two Jerohams (Jorams) ruled, one in the north and the other in the south. At that time the prophet Elisha was still active in the kingdom of the ten tribes. The Joram of Israel (852–841 BC) was dominated by his fanatical mother Jezebel who was doing all within her power to convert the northern kingdom to the worship of Baal. Joram of Judah (848–841 BC) had married Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. Through this marriage the pagan religious and social concepts of the north were transported into Judah. At one point Athaliah almost succeeded in exterminating all representatives of the house of David (2 Kgs 11:1–3; 2 Chr 22: 10–12). Those were desperate days in both kingdoms. Yahweh countered the move toward idolatry with the miracles of Elijah and Elisha and the mighty messages of the succession of writing prophets.

B. Chronology of the Collection

The twelve prophetic pamphlets were probably originally brought together because of their small size; at least that is an explanation found in the Talmud (*Baaba Bahtra*, 14b). Placing these separate works on one scroll helped preserve them from loss.

Probably the collection was assembled in the Persian Period, perhaps not long after Malachi's ministry had ended. Orelli thinks it is possible that the majority of these documents were found together in a special collection even before the Exile.⁵ Rabbinic tradition held that the men of the Great Synagogue edited the Book of the Twelve

sea, but the ministry of Hosea chronologically would precede that of Micah.

⁵ C. von Orelli, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*. Trans. J.S. Banks. 1897 (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1977 reprint) p.1

(*Baaba Bahtra*, 15a). This is probably referring to the collecting of the twelve books into one volume. The Great Synagogue was a body of learned scribes said to have been formed by Ezra. This body continued to exist into the early third century B.C.

The collection of twelve prophetic pamphlets was known as *The Twelve* as early as the intertestamental writing of Ben Sirach (Ecclus 49:10). The twelve separate volumes were considered as one canonical book both by Josephus in the first century AD (*Against Apion* 1:8) and by the Talmudic scholars of the fifth Christian century.

Arrangement of Books

The issues of how, when and why the twelve books of the Minor Prophets were placed together in one volume have been addressed by only a few scholars. Actually the Book of the Twelve appears in two formats, viz. the Greek and the Hebrew.

A. The Greek Arrangement

As noted above, in the Hebrew canon the Book of the Twelve was the fourth book in the Latter prophets following Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In some Greek manuscripts (eg. Alexandrinus and Vaticanus) the Minor Prophets actually precede the Major Prophets. The logic of this placement probably has something to do with chronology. The Book of the Twelve begins with books which are older than Isaiah.

The order of the twelve prophets in the Septuagint differs from that of the traditional Hebrew text. In neither arrangement is chronology strictly observed. The English

translations have followed the order of the Hebrew. A comparison of the two ancient formats of the Book of the Twelve is set forth in Chart No. 2.

Chart No. 2

ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENTS OF THE MINOR PROPHETS

<i>Hebrew Arrangement</i>	<i>Greek Arrangement</i>	<i>Chronological Arrangement</i>
1. Hosea	1. Hosea	1. Obadiah
2. Joel	2. Amos	2. Joel
3. Amos	3. Micah	3. Jonah
4. Obadiah	4. Joel	4. Amos
5. Jonah	5. Obadiah	5. Hosea
6. Micah	6. Jonah	6. Micah
7. Nahum	7. Nahum	7. Nahum
8. Habakkuk	8. Habakkuk	8. Zephaniah
9. Zephaniah	9. Zephaniah	9. Habakkuk
10. Haggai	10. Haggai	10. Haggai
11. Zechariah	11. Zechariah	11. Zechariah
12. Malachi	12. Malachi	12. Malachi

The Hebrew arrangement seems to be more original; yet neither arrangement is decisive in determining the date of these writings. Both arrangements follow broad chronological principles in that the books of the pre-Assyrian and Assyrian periods are placed before the books of the Chaldean period (Habakkuk and Zephaniah). Both arrangements conclude with the triad of postexilic prophets (Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi) in the order in which they appeared. Within the books of the pre-Assyrian and Assyrian periods, however, the chronological order was not strictly preserved. Other considerations appear to have outweighed chronology in the placement of books.