

# THE TWELVE

(A Study of the Minor Prophets)

## Introduction

The last twelve books of the Old Testament canon are often referred to as the Minor Prophets. The word “canon” means an ecclesiastical rule or law enacted by a council or other competent authority. When scholars refer to the “canon of Scripture,” it means the list of books contained in Scripture and recognized as worthy to be included in the sacred writings. When books are included in “the canon,” they have been recognized as being genuine and of divine inspiration. A term used by early Jewish rabbis was that these books “defiled the hands.” From a biblical standpoint, a book included in the canon of Scripture means that it was inspired by God.

2 Timothy 3:16

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

The title “the Minor Prophets” is believed to have originated from Augustine’s time (late fourth-century A.D.). This term is used simply because these books are much shorter than some of the other prophetic books such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel. For example, all chapters of these twelve prophets combined total 67 chapters. Isaiah itself is 66 chapters in length. However, they are no less important. “All” Scripture is inspired by God.

The first mention of “The Twelve” in writings can be found in Ecclesiasticus, an Apocryphal book by Jesus Ben Sira written around 190 B.C. After mentioning the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah, he writes, “And of the twelve prophets let the memorial be blessed, and let their bones flourish out of their place” (Ecclesiasticus 49:10).

Most of these books give reference to kings and/or events from the time they were written, but not all of the books provide this information. Based on what is known, the oldest of these books is probably the prophet Jonah, written somewhere between 785-770 B.C. The last of these books is the prophet Malachi, written around 400 B.C.

The Hebrew Scriptures were divided into three categories – The Law (Torah), The Prophets (Nevi’im), and The Writings (Kethuvim) – and contained 24 books. Jesus may have been referring to this division of the Old Testament in Luke 24:44.

Luke 24:44

Now he said to them, “These are my words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

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### The 24 books of the Hebrew Canon

<b>The Law (Torah)</b>	<b>The Prophets (Nevi'im)</b>	<b>The Writings (Kethuvim)</b>
Genesis	Joshua	Psalms
Exodus	Judges	Proverbs
Leviticus	Samuel	Job
Numbers	Kings	Song of Songs
Deuteronomy	Isaiah	Ruth
	Jeremiah	Lamentations
	Ezekiel	Ecclesiastes
	The Twelve	Esther
		Daniel
		Ezra-Nehemiah
		Chronicles

In all versions of the Old Testament, the twelve are always grouped together. Some versions of the Greek Septuagint list them in a slightly different order, but they always are grouped together. It is not known what originally determined the final order of this list, but in the Hebrew Bible, the Roman Catholic Bible, and the Protestant Bible, they are listed as the following.

Hosea  
Joel  
Amos  
Obadiah  
Jonah  
Micah  
Nahum  
Habakkuk  
Zephaniah  
Haggai  
Zechariah  
Malachi

The twelve prophets can also be grouped into three categories based on whether the prophecies were directed to the northern kingdom of Israel, the southern kingdom of Judah, or postexilic prophets. If one were to group the twelve in this manner, the groupings would be something like following chart.

## The Twelve

GROUP	BOOK	Approximate Dates	No. of Chapters	TOTAL
PROPHETS OF ISRAEL	Jonah	784-772 B.C.	4	27
	Amos	765-755 B.C.	9	
	Hosea	755-713 B.C.	14	
PROPHETS OF JUDAH	Obadiah	Date? 853 or 605 B.C.	1	20
	Joel	Date? 820 or 586 B.C.	3	
	Micah	750-686 B.C.	7	
	Nahum	663-612 B.C.	3	
	Habakkuk	640-598 B.C.	3	
	Zephaniah	640-609 B.C.	3	
POSTEXILIC PROPHETS	Haggai	520-516 B.C.	2	20
	Zechariah	520-516 B.C.	14	
	Malachi	433-400 B.C.	4	

When studying any of the prophets, one should study the books of Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah to provide the historical context in which they were written.

KINGS OF ISRAEL	KINGS OF JUDAH	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE	THE TWELVE PROPHETS
Jehoash Jeroboam II Zechariah Shallum Menahem Pekahiah Pekah	Azariah (Uzziah)  Jotham Ahaz  Hezekiah Manasseh Amon Josiah Jehoahaz Jehoiakim Jehoiachin Zedekiah (carried captive to Babylon)	2 Kgs 13:10-14:15	Obadiah; Joel (??) Jonah Amos Hosea  Micah  Nahum Zephaniah Habakkuk
		2 Kgs 14:16-29; 2 Chr 26:1-23	
		2 Kgs 15:1-12	
		2 Kgs 15:13-16	
		2 Kgs 15:17-22	
		2 Kgs 15:23-26	
		2 Kgs 15:27-31	
		2 Kgs 15:32-38; 2 Chr 27:1ff	
		2 Kgs 16:1-20; 2 Chr 28:1ff	
		2 Kgs 17:1-41;	
Hoshea (carried into captivity by Assyria)		2 Kgs 18:1ff-20:1ff; 2 Chr 29-32	
		2 Kgs 21:1-18; 2 Chr 33:1-20	
		2 Kgs 21:19-26; 2 Chr 33:21-25	
		2 Kgs 22:1-23:30; 2 Chr 34-35	
		2 Kgs 23:30-33; 2 Chr 36:1-3	
		2 Kgs 23:34-24:5; 2 Chr 36:4-8	
		2 Kgs 24:6-16; 2 Chr 36:8-10	
		2 Kgs 24:17-25:30; 2 Chr 36:11-21	
70 Years of captivity	in Babylon >>>	2 Chr 36:22-23; Ezekiel; Daniel	
Return from Exile -	Re-build the temple	Ezra	Haggai; Zechariah
	Re-build the wall	Nehemiah	

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	Malachi
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# HOSEA

## Introduction/Background

Hosea 1:1

There is no more information about the man Hosea than what is recorded here. He is the son of Beeri. Chronologically, the book of Hosea follows after Jonah and Amos, but in the canon of Scripture, it is listed first. The name Hosea or *Oshea* means “salvation.”

Although the primary audience for the book of Hosea is the northern kingdom of Israel, there is admonition for Judah as well. The word of Yahweh came to Hosea during the day of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. The only king of Israel listed is Jeroboam (Jeroboam II). However, other kings of Israel reigned during this time. Israeli kings, Zechariah, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea, all came after King Jeroboam and ruled during the same time period as these kings of Judah. That means that Hosea’s prophecy spanned many years during the last, final days of the northern kingdom of Israel.

Date (B.C.)	Kings of Israel	Kings of Judah	Hosea’s Ministry	Assyrian Kings
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805	Jeroboam II			Adad-Nirari III		
800						
795		Uzziah	HOSEA			
790						
785						Shalmaneser IV
780						
775						
770						Ashur-Dan II
765		Zechariah				
764		Shallum				
763	Menahem					
760		Jotham			Ashur-Nirari V	
753	Pekahiah					
751	Pekah			Tilgath-Pileser III		
745						
744		Ahaz				
735						
731	Hoshea			Shalmaneser V		
728		Hezekiah				
722	Assyrian Captivity →			Sargon II		
715						
710						
705				Sennacherib		
700						

### Chapter 1

#### Hosea 1:1-11

There is much background information relating to the northern kingdom of Israel which is fundamental to understanding the context of what is being communicated through these children born to Hosea's "wife of harlotry." The history of the northern kingdom is wrought with idolatry from its very foundation.

#### 1 Kings 12:25-33; 13:33-34

The first king, Jeroboam (not Jeroboam II), split from the nation of Judah, took 10 tribes and formed the northern kingdom of Israel. Rather than following Yahweh, Jeroboam set up golden calves at each end of his kingdom, one in Bethel and the other in Dan. This idolatry plagued northern Israel for the entire time it was a nation. Jeroboam became the standard of evil to which subsequent kings of Israel were compared (1 Kings 15:25-26, 33-34; 16:25-26).

1 Kings 16:29-31 – Not only did Ahab continue in the sins of Jeroboam with worshipping the golden calves, but he married Jezebel and introduced Baal worship into northern Israel. This worship of Baal continued for many years.

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2 Kings 9:1-3; 6-10 – Finally, Elisha the prophet sent one of his young servants to anoint Jehu king over Israel and gave command to destroy the house of Ahab. Jehu killed Ahab and Jezebel. He then proceeded to have all the sons of Ahab killed.

2 Kings 10:1-3, 6-11 In Jezreel, Jehu had all the sons of Ahab beheaded, killing all who remained of the house of Ahab. After this, Jehu brought all of the Baal worshippers into the house of Baal in Samaria and had them all slaughtered, eradicating Baal worship in Israel (2 Kings 10:18-28).

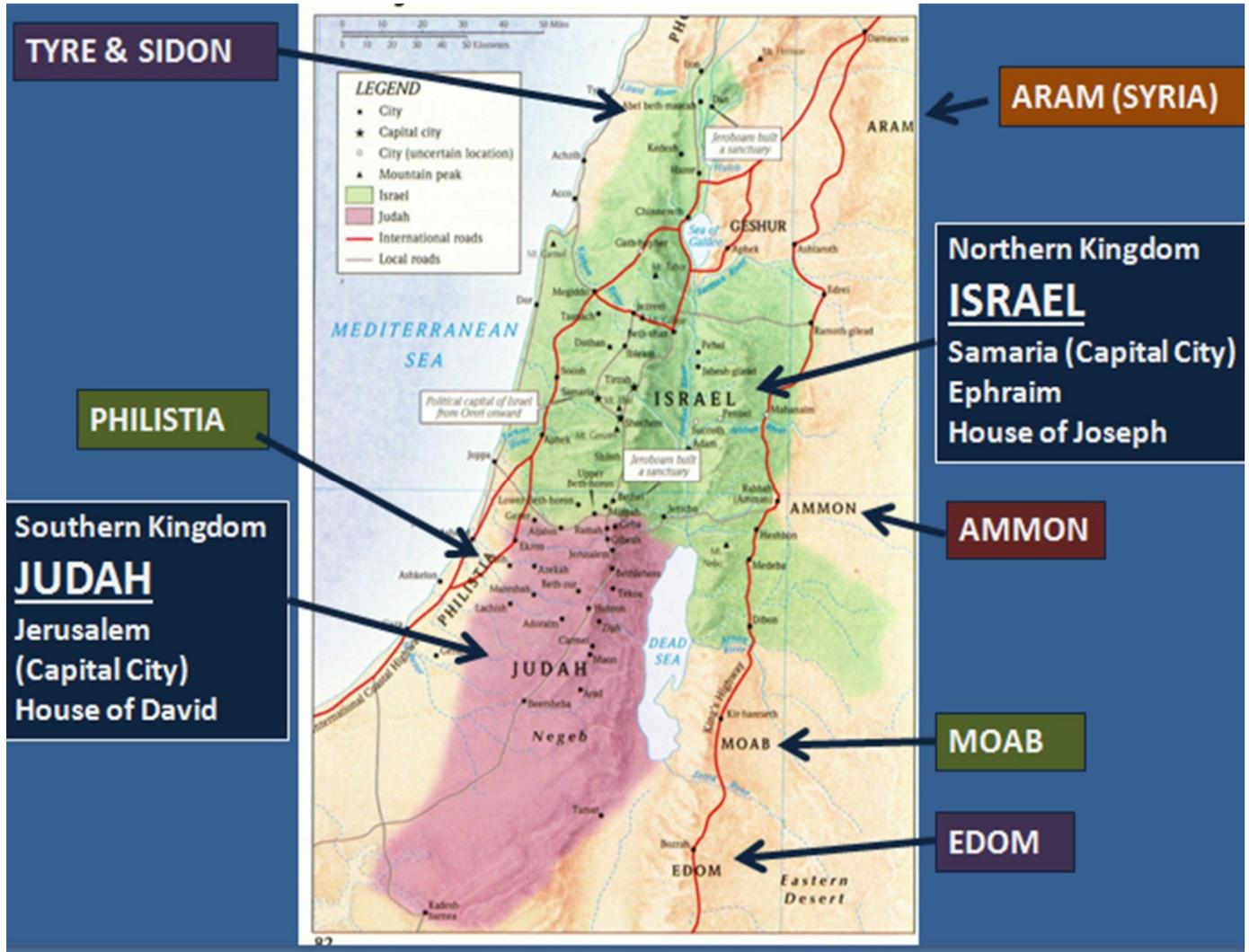
2 Kings 10:21-29 – However, even though Jehu rid Israel of Baal worship, he did not depart from the golden calf worship, but rather he continued in the sin of Jeroboam.

2 Kings 14:23-24 – Jeroboam II was the great grandson of Jehu (3<sup>rd</sup> generation). He ruled longer than any king in northern Israel's history (41 years). The kings of Israel continued in the idolatry of Jeroboam, son of Nebat (2 Kings 15:8-9, 17-18; 23-24; 27-28).

Hosea is written during the times of these last kings of Israel as a nation. The book offers strong admonition and vivid imagery of Israel's sin and idolatry, warning of the judgment of Yahweh that would be coming. At the same time, great hope for the future is presented, and within the words of the prophet are calls for the people to repent and return so that God could heal them. The bloodshed at Jezreel did not bring an end to idolatry in the land. Yahweh said to Israel "Lo-ammi" – "You are not My people and I am not your God." However, there is a future hope for the restoration of Israel and hope when one leader will join them together. And others, who were "not my people" it will be said, "You are the sons of the Living God" (Romans 9:25-26). Then, great will be the day of Jezreel.

# HOSEA – The Message

## The Land of Judah/Israel



## The Whoredom of Northern Israel

Israel was filled with idolatry from the very start. Although the book of Hosea has a vast amount of figurative language, one particular metaphor dominates its message – the nation of Israel is a harlot in their relationship to God because they sought after other lovers, other gods. The NASB version uses the word “harlot” or “harlotry.” The King James Version and the English Standard Version use the word “whore” or “whoredom.”

God warned His people from the time of Moses as to what would happen if they whored after other gods.

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Deuteronomy 31:16-18 (ESV)

And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers. Then this people will rise and whore after the foreign gods among them in the land that they are entering, and they will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them.

Then my anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide my face from them, and they will be devoured. And many evils and troubles will come upon them, so that they will say in that day, 'Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?'

And I will surely hide my face in that day because of all the evil that they have done, because they have turned to other gods.

In chapter one of Hosea, the prophet is told by Yahweh to marry a harlot. She then has three children, and their names reveal the judgment of God.

- *Jezreel* means "God sows" (Hosea 1:4).
- *Lo-ruhamah* means "she has not obtained compassion" or "no mercy" (Hosea 1:6).
- *Lo-ammi* means "not my people" (Hosea 1:9).

Israel was involved in both Baal worship and golden calf worship. They lusted after these idols rather than seeking Yahweh. Through the covenant relationship with God's people, the Scriptures often compare this relationship to a marriage, where God is the husband and Israel His bride. His people turned from Him and gave their love, worship, and adoration to other gods, to other lovers. The metaphorical use of a whore, an adulterous woman, an unfaithful bride is an appropriate analogy. This is throughout the book of Hosea.

### **The Spirit of Whoredom in Israel**

- When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." (Hos 1:2 ESV)
- And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals when she burned offerings to them and adorned herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers and forgot me, declares the LORD. (Hos 2:13 ESV)
- And the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins." (Hos 3:1 ESV)
- Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land; (Hos 4:1 ESV)
- They shall eat, but not be satisfied; they shall play the whore, but not multiply, because they have forsaken the LORD to cherish. (Hos 4:10 ESV)
- My people inquire of a piece of wood, and their walking staff gives them oracles. For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray, and they have left their God to play the whore. (Hos 4:12 ESV)
- Though you play the whore, O Israel, let not Judah become guilty;

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(Hos 4:15a ESV)

- Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone. (Hos 4:17 ESV)
- When their drink is gone, they give themselves to whoring; their rulers dearly love shame. (Hos 4:18 ESV)
- Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not the LORD. (Hos 5:4 ESV)
- For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me. (Hos 6:6-7 ESV)
- In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing; Ephraim's whoredom is there; Israel is defiled. (Hos 6:10 ESV)
- By their evil they make the king glad, and the princes by their treachery. They are all adulterers; (Hos 7:3-4a ESV)
- With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction. I have spurned your calf, O Samaria. My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of innocence? For it is from Israel; a craftsman made it; it is not God. The calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces. (Hos 8:4b-6 ESV)
- Rejoice not, O Israel! Exult not like the peoples; for you have played the whore, forsaking your God. You have loved a prostitute's wages on all threshing floors. (Hos 9:1 ESV)
- But they came to Baal-peor and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved. (Hos 9:10 ESV)
- Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars. Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt. The LORD will break down their altars and destroy their pillars. (Hos 10:1-2 ESV)
- The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols. (Hos 11:2 ESV)
- When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling; he was exalted in Israel, but he incurred guilt through Baal and died. And now they sin more and more, and make for themselves metal images, idols skillfully made of their silver, all of them the work of craftsmen. It is said of them, "Those who offer human sacrifice kiss calves!" (Hos 13:1-2 ESV)

The allure of Baal worship and the worship of the golden calves were thoroughly entwined. Both gods represented agricultural and reproductive fertility. The worship practices included drunkenness, human sacrifice, and ritual prostitution. Male and female prostitutes were employed by local shrines and were considered "priests" and "priestesses" of the gods. The people of Canaan engaged in sacred sexual intercourse with the cult prostitutes as part of Baal worship. There was no constraint from the leaders, and Israel rejected Yahweh, following after their own lusts. This brought tremendous evil to the nation. Hosea did not hold back in declaring the assessment from Yahweh.

There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land; There is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Therefore the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish. (Hos 4:1b-3a ESV)

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They shall eat, but not be satisfied; they shall play the whore, but not multiply, because they have forsaken the LORD to cherish whoredom, wine, and new wine, which take away the understanding. (Hos 4:10-11 ESV)

They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar, and terebinth, because their shade is good. Therefore your daughters play the whore, and your brides commit adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore, nor your brides when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go aside with prostitutes and sacrifice with cult prostitutes, and a people without understanding shall come to ruin. (Hos 4:13-14 ESV)

### Hosea 2:19-23

Although Israel would be punished, God will not forsake His people. His lovingkindness, compassion, and faithfulness are forever! In that day, God will sow [Jezreel] His people for Himself. He will have compassion on those who had no compassion [Lo-ruhamah]. And He will say to those who were not My People [Lo-ammi], "You are My people." And they will say, "You are my God."

### Hosea 3:1ff

The woman in this verse is Gomer of chapter one. Although Hosea loved her, she was an unfaithful, adulterous woman. In her unfaithfulness, Hosea purchased her for himself, and she would not play the Harlot. This allegory is for the nation of Israel. They would go into captivity and remain many days without a prince or a king. But afterward, the sons of Israel will return and seek Yahweh their God and David their king, and they will come trembling to the LORD in the last days.

## Israel's Reliance on Egypt and Assyria

(2 Kings 15:19-20 – King Menahem paid tribute to Pul (Tilgath-Pileser) of Assyria: 2 Kings 17:3-4 - King Hoshea paid tribute to Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, and sent messengers to So, king of Egypt.)

Hos 5:13 When Ephraim saw his sickness, And Judah his wound, Then Ephraim went to Assyria And sent to King Jareb. But he is unable to heal you, Or to cure you of your wound.

Hos 7:11 So Ephraim has become like a silly dove, without sense; They call to Egypt, they go to Assyria.

Hos 12:1 Ephraim feeds on wind, And pursues the east wind continually; He multiplies lies and violence. Moreover, he makes a covenant with Assyria, And oil is carried to Egypt.

Hos 14:3 "Assyria will not save us...."

### Israel would be taken captive into Assyria

Hos 8:8 Israel is swallowed up; They are now among the nations Like a vessel in which no one delights.

Hos 8:9 For they have gone up to Assyria, *Like* a wild donkey all alone;

Hos 8:13 As for My sacrificial gifts, They sacrifice the flesh and eat *it*, *But* the LORD has taken no delight in them. Now He will remember their iniquity, And punish *them* for their sins; They will return to Egypt.

Hos 9:3b They will not remain in the LORD'S land, But Ephraim will return to Egypt, And in Assyria they will eat unclean *food*.

Hos 11:5 They will not return to the land of Egypt; But Assyria--he will be their king Because they refused to return *to Me*.

Hos 10:5-6a The inhabitants of Samaria will fear For the calf of Beth-aven. Indeed, its people will mourn for it, And its idolatrous priests will cry out over it, over its glory, since it has departed from it. The thing itself will be carried to Assyria as a tribute to King Jareb;

### Jacob/Israel at Bethel

Hosea 12:2-8

At times in the book of Hosea, Bethel (house of God) is referred to as Beth-aven (house of vanity). Hos 4:15; 5:8; 10:5, 8

### God's Call to Repent

Hosea 6:1-6

Hosea 14:1ff

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# JOEL – The Day of Yahweh is Near

## Dating the Book of Joel

Joel 1:1

There is no more information about Joel or about his father Pethuel than what is written here in verse 1. Clearly the message is centered on the southern kingdom of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem is mentioned six times in these three chapters, and the term “Zion” occurs seven times. (Neither “Jerusalem” or “Zion” were mentioned in any of the 14 chapters of Hosea.) There is no reference to Samaria or Ephraim in the book of Joel.

KINGS OF ISRAEL	KINGS OF JUDAH	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE	THE TWELVE PROPHETS
	Joash	2 Kgs 12:17-19; 2 Chr 24:23-25	<b>Joel?</b>
Jehoash	Amaziah	2 Kgs 13:10-14:15	Obadiah??
Jeroboam II	Azariah (Uzziah)	2 Kgs 14:16-29; 2 Chr 26:1-23	Jonah
Zechariah		2 Kgs 15:1-12	Amos
Shallum		2 Kgs 15:13-16	Hosea
Menahem		2 Kgs 15:17-22	<b>Joel?</b>
Pekahiah		2 Kgs 15:23-26	
Pekah	Jotham	2 Kgs 15:27-31	
	Ahaz	2 Kgs 15:32-38; 2 Chr 27	
		2 Kgs 16:1-20; 2 Chr 28	
Hoshea (carried into captivity by Assyria)	Hezekiah	2 Kgs 17:1-41;	
	Manasseh	2 Kgs 18-20; 2 Chr 29-32	Micah
	Amon	2 Kgs 21:1-18; 2 Chr 33:1-20	
	Josiah	2 Kgs 21:19-26; 2 Chr 33:21-25	Nahum
	Jehoahaz	2 Kgs 22:1-23:30; 2 Chr 34-35	Zephaniah
	Jehoiakim	2 Kgs 23:30-33; 2 Chr 36:1-3	Habakkuk
	Jehoiachin	2 Kgs 23:34-24:5; 2 Chr 36:4-8	
	Zedekiah (carried captive to Babylon)	2 Kgs 24:6-16; 2 Chr 36:8-10	<b>Joel?</b>
		2 Kgs 24:17-25:30; 2 Chr 36:11-21	
70 Years of captivity	in Babylon >>>	2 Chr 36:22-23; Ezekiel; Daniel	
Return from exile -	Re-build the Temple	Ezra	Haggai; Zechariah
	Re-build the wall	Nehemiah	<b>Joel?</b>
			Malachi

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No references are given to the rule of any kings, so it is difficult to provide a specific date. There are different opinions. One is that this would have been one of the earliest of the “the twelve,” written around 820 B.C. during the days of Joash, king of Judah, (2 Kings 12:17-19; 2 Chronicles 24:23-25) when Hazael king of Aram/Syria fought against Jerusalem. Another popular belief is it was written during the pivotal days of Uzziah (792-740 B.C.). Some have suggested a postexilic date after the time of Haggai and Zechariah (520-516 B.C.). Another likely possibility is that it was written during the time of Jeremiah, during the reign of the last king of Judah, Zedekiah (597 – 586 B.C.). Evidence for this date would fit with God’s judgment by pestilence, famine, and sword (Jeremiah 21:7-9; 24:10; 27:7-9, 13; Ezekiel 5:12, 16-17). The devastation of the land caused by the locusts in chapter one would fit with pestilence and famine in the land. Also, the Babylonian king and the invading army from the north during the time of King Zedekiah would also fit the description.

### The Locusts

Joel 1:2-6 This does not seem to be a figure of speech, but rather it was a real, known event that occurred – swarming locusts invaded the land of Judah. “...a nation has invaded my land, mighty and without number; Its teeth are the teeth of a lion, And it has the fangs of a lioness.” There is no record of this swarm of locusts in any of the historical writings.

Joel 1:7-20 The devastation in the land caused by the locusts

Locusts are a plague upon the land. They devastate vegetation. God used locusts in the past as part of His judgment and included them as part of the curse of disobedience (Exodus 10:12-15; Deuteronomy 28:15, 36-38; Psalm 105:34-35). The book of Revelation tells of locusts when the fifth trumpet sounds (Revelation 9:2-10). However, this may be figurative, as the locusts in Revelation will not hurt the vegetation but will torment men for five months. The account in Joel could be a foreshadowing of this future event.

### The Day of the LORD is near

Joel 1:14-15 – The locusts were a sign that the day of the LORD is near. Blow a trumpet, consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly. Joel 2:1, 11, 15, 31; 3:14

Joel 2:1-17

An invasion of a mighty people “arranged for battle”

Joel 2:18-27

God will remove the northern army and restore the land devastated by the locusts.

Joel 2:28-32

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Here, Joel prophesies of the promise of the spirit, and events that will take place before the great and notable Day of the LORD. On the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted from Joel and indicated that the outpouring of the holy spirit was that which was spoken by the prophet Joel. Peter called this time “the last days” (Acts 2:17-21).

Joel 3:1ff

God will restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem.

He will gather all the nations and enter into judgment with them in the “valley of Jehoshaphat” (verse 12; also called the “valley of decision” – verse 14). During the reign of Jehoshaphat, there is a time when the nations of Moab, Edom, and Ammon invaded and began to ascend to Jerusalem from the valley. Jehoshaphat gathered a solemn assembly and proclaimed a fast. God delivered the people of Judah, causing the enemy to destroy one another. When they looked out over the valley, there were dead corpses. After this event, the nation of Judah experienced a period of peace time under the reign of Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20:1-30).