

Introduction to Prophets

Prophets do some foretelling. They warn the wicked and encourage the righteous. The prophets are not primarily interested in the future. They are more concerned with the past and present failings of the nation in their relationships to God and man. They focused on the lack of morals in society and on people's failure to keep the law. They constantly exhorted the people to an internal righteousness rather than an external adherence to the law. Perhaps one of the most famous passages is [Micah 6:8](http://net.bible.org/#!bible/Micah%206:8) which says

*He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?* (NRSV)

Prophets were traditionalists who proclaimed a doom and gloom message. They wrote to remind the Israelites of the covenants and their responsibilities. They also reminded the people of the results of disobedience. They assume that the Israelites remember the covenants and laws in Deuteronomy and make many references to them. In fact, *unless you understand Deuteronomy 28-30 you cannot appreciate or perhaps even understand what the prophets are talking about.*

The Mosaic covenant of Deuteronomy follows the same structure of the Susserain-Vassal Treaty which was popular in that day between a king or lord and his subjects. He would lay down the law and then promise to protect them if they were loyal and promise to destroy them if they were not loyal. Read: Deuteronomy 28:1-6 and 15-18, 48-50 and 30:15-20. God makes it very clear what would happen if they were not faithful to Him.

The prophets also proclaimed a salvation message. Most of the prophets include a “promise of future deliverance” section. They would usually give a message of doom and gloom and then tell the people about the light at the end of the tunnel to give them hope. Sometimes these salvation messages were "crystal ball" visions describing a particular event which they had seen in a vision (e.g. [Dan 9](http://net.bible.org/#!bible/Dan%209): and the 70th week), but sometimes they were just claiming and proclaiming the promises of God to Abraham and David that he would make the nation great, send the Messiah and bring the Gentiles into the kingdom.

God had made promises to Abraham that he would make his seed into a great nation, that he would give him the land of Israel and that through his seed the nations of the world would be blessed. *God’s promises were unconditional and He would eventually keep them*. But the individual’s welfare and the nation’s immediate welfare depended on the people’s faithfulness.

History

In the Bible the prophets are arranged according to the Major and Minor prophetic books. The only difference between the two is the number of pages written. The Minor Prophets are not less important than the Major prophets, they are just more concise.

It is important to understand what is going on in the nation’s history, which enemy nations are threatening Israel’s borders (Assyria, Babylon, etc.), what is happening politically, etc.

The terms, pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic prophets, are a reference to when the prophets spoke in relation to the Babylonian captivity.

* The pre-exilic prophets came to warn of impending judgment.
	+ Obadiah wrote to or about Edom. Amos, Hosea and Joel wrote to the northern kingdom.  Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah and Jeremiah wrote to warn Judah.
* The exilic prophets wrote to assure the people that God would restore them to the land.
	+ Ezekiel and Daniel wrote from Babylon to encourage the people that God would restore the nation.
* The post exilic prophets wrote to assure the people that God would deal with the restored community according to the same principles. They might have been tempted to think that because Babylonia had defeated Israel and that the Babylonian gods were superior to Yahweh. One of the postexilic prophet's jobs was to point out that Yahweh was superior and the only reason Israel was defeated was because Yahweh was disciplining them.
	+ Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi were writing to the people who had returned to Jerusalem from Babylon.

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| **THE PROPHETS IN HISTORY (9th-5th century BC)** **(Holeman Bible Handbook)** |
| **Prophet**  | **Approx. Dates**  | **Location/ Home**  | **Basic Bible Passage**  | **Central Teaching**  | **Key Verse**  |
| **Elijah**  | **875-850**  | **Tishbe**  | **1 Kgs 17:1-** **2 Kgs 2:18**  | **Yahweh, not Baal, is God**  | **1 Kgs 18:21**  |
| **Micaiah**  | **856**  | **Samaria**  | **1 Kgs 22;** **2 Chr 18**  | **Proof of prophesy**  | **1 Kgs 22:28**  |
| **Elisha**  | **855-800**  | **Abel Meholah**  | **1 Kgs 19:15-21; 2 Kgs 2-9; 13**  | **God’s miraculous power**  | **2 Kgs 5:15**  |
| **Jonah**  | **775**  | **Gath Hepher**  | **2 Kgs 14:25; Jonah**  | **God’s universal concern**  | **Jonah 4:11**  |
| **Amos**  | **765**  | **Tekoa**  | **Amos**  | **God’s call for justice & righteousness**  | **Amos 5:24**  |
| **Hosea**  | **750**  | **Israel**  | **Hosea**  | **God’s unquenchable love** | **Hos 11:8-9**  |
| **Isaiah**  | **740-698**  | **Jerusalem**  | **2 Kgs 19-20; Isaiah**  | **Hope through repentance & suffering**  | **Isa 1:18;**  **53:4-6**  |
| **Micah**  | **735-710**  | **Moresheth, Gath, Jerusalem**  | **Jer 26:18; Micah**  | **Call for humble mercy & justice**  | **Mic 6:8**  |
| **Oded**  | **733**  | **Samaria**  | **2 Chr 28:9-11**  | **Do not go beyond God’s command**  | **2 Chr 28:9**  |
| **Zephaniah**  | **630**  | **?**  | **Zephaniah**  | **Hope for the humble righteous**  | **Zeph 2:3**  |
| **Nahum**  | **625**  | **Elkosh**  | **Nahum**  | **God’s jealousy protects His people**  | **Nah 1:2-3**  |
| **Habakkuk**  | **625**  | **?**  | **Habakkuk**  | **God’s call for faithfulness**  | **Hab 2:4**  |
| **Jeremiah**  | **626-584**  | **Anathoth/ Jerusalem**  | **2 Chr 36:12; Jeremiah**  | **Faithful prophet points to new covenant**  | **Jer 31:33-34**  |
| **Huldah (the prophetess)** | **621**  | **Jerusalem**  | **2 Kgs 22;** **2 Chr 34**  | **God’s Book is accurate**  | **2 Kgs 22:16**  |
| **Ezekiel**  | **593-571**  | **Babylon**  | **Ezekiel**  | **Future hope for new community of worship**  | **Ezek 37:12-13**  |
| **Joel**  | **588 (?)**  | **Jerusalem**  | **Joel**  | **Call to repent & experience God’s Spirit**  | **Joel 2:28-29**  |
| **Obadiah**  | **580**  | **Jerusalem**  | **Obadiah**  | **Doom on Edom to bring God’s kingdom**  | **Obad 21**  |
| **Haggai**  | **520**  | **Jerusalem**  | **Ezra 5:1; 6:14; Haggai**  | **The priority of God’s house**  | **Hag 2:8-9**  |
| **Zechariah**  | **520-514**  | **Jerusalem**  | **Ezra 5:1; 6:14; Zechariah**  | **Faithfulness leads to God’s universal rule**  | **Zech 14:9**  |
| **Malachi**  | **433**  | **Jerusalem**  | **Malachi**  | **Honor God & wait for His righteousness**  | **Mal 4:2**  |

**Themes of Major Prophets**

**Isaiah**

The theme of Isaiah’s prophecy may be summarized as follows: God’s ideal for His covenant people Israel will indeed be realized but only after His judgment purifies the covenant community of those who rebel against His authority. God is the “Holy One of Israel,” who sovereignly controls the destiny of nations but who also demands loyalty from His people.

**Jeremiah**

Like so many of the other writing prophets of the Old Testament, Jeremiah promised that God would ultimately fulfill His ideal for Israel, but only after a time of purifying judgment and exile. God would not tolerate unfaithfulness among His people. Judgment would sweep away covenant violators and pave the way for the establishment of a new covenant.

**Lamentations**

The author lamented the fall of Jerusalem. While acknowledging that the calamity was deserved, he longed for God to restore His favor.

**Ezekiel**

Ezekiel warned his fellow exiles against any wishful thoughts that Jerusalem might be spared. As portrayed in Ezekiel’s visions, the glory of the Lord had departed from the city, leaving it vulnerable to destruction. Judah would pay for its rebellion against the Lord. However, the Lord would eventually restore His people to the land and reestablish pure worship in a new temple.

**Daniel**

Daniel portrays God as the sovereign Ruler of the universe, who controls the destinies of both pagan empires and His exiled people. He revealed His mighty power to the kings of Babylon and Persia, forcing them to acknowledge His supremacy. He revealed to Daniel His future plans to restore His people Israel once the times of the Gentiles had run their course.