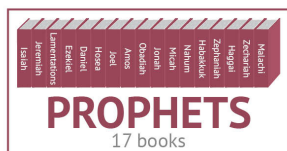


Prophetic Books



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Introduction



Introduction

The focus of this lesson is Israel’s prophets or, more accurately, Israel’s writing prophets. Elijah and Elisha, two of Israel’s most famous prophets, didn’t write their messages. They represent the many other prophets whose sermons are not recorded but who faithfully ministered for God.

The Beginning of the Prophetic Office

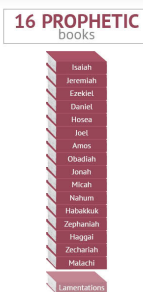
The Beginning of the Prophetic Office

The prophetic office was instituted in Moses’ day and is recorded in Deuteronomy 18:18–19, where God said to Moses, “I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him” (NASB). A few important points about the prophetic ministry and these amazing men and women will clarify their mission.

“I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.”
Deuteronomy 18:18-20

First, it was God who ordained the prophetic office. He said, “I will raise up a prophet.” Second, God was the source of the prophets’ messages: “I will put My words in his mouth.” Third, God said, “he shall speak to them all that I command him.” The prophet had to proclaim all that God said—both the good news and the bad news. Fourth, the prophet spoke with God’s authority. God warned, “It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which [the prophet] shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.” God’s reassurance to the prophets was that they were His prophets. They spoke for God, and those who heard or read their proclamations would be held accountable to God Himself for what they said. Verses 20–22 warned that any false prophet who proclaimed a message that *wasn’t* from God would die. The Old Testament prophetic ministry was serious business, and these men and women played an enormous role in Israel’s history.

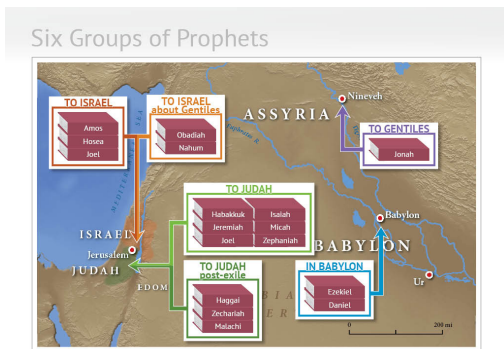
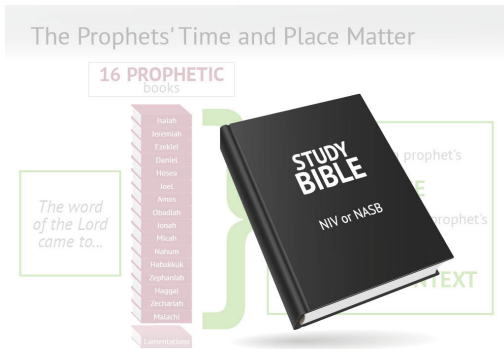
The Prophets’ Time and Place Matter



The Prophets' Time and Place Matter

There are sixteen prophetic books in the Old Testament. Jeremiah's Lamentations is sometimes listed with the prophets and, if so, the number is seventeen. The prophets spoke their messages to different people in different places; and to understand a prophet's message we must understand to whom that prophet was speaking. The theme of a prophet's message grew out of their culture. When they saw something that concerned them happening among the people, they went to God and God gave them a message to guide those people in that situation. More often their messages began with, "The word of the Lord came to," and the prophet would name himself as God's spokesman. The word God gave the prophet addressed something in the prophet's immediate circumstances. That's why we must understand the culture or the situation a prophet was addressing before his message can make sense to us.

In fact, let me urge you to get a good study Bible in a translation of the Bible you like. You'll see the words "Study Bible" in the Bible's title. Titles like the *The NIV Study Bible*, *The NASB Study Bible*, and others will give you the historical context into which the prophets spoke.



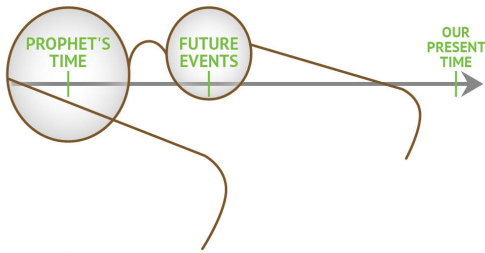
Six Groups of Prophets

We divide the writing prophets into six groups. Three prophets spoke to or about Gentiles. Jonah spoke to the city of Nineveh, which was the capital of Assyria. Obadiah and Nahum spoke to Israel, but their messages were about Edom and Nineveh. Joel, Amos, and Hosea ministered to the northern nation of Israel. Six of the prophets—Isaiah, Joel, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Micah, and Habakkuk—ministered to the southern nation of Judah. Ezekiel and Daniel ministered in Babylon during Judah's exile; and Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi proclaimed their messages to Judah's people after they returned from exile during the reconstruction period.

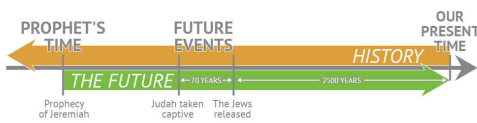


Understanding when and to whom each prophet proclaimed his message is absolutely essential. For instance, if you don't understand that Haggai was encouraging Judah's returned exiles to rebuild God's temple after the destruction, his messages makes no sense. So before we read any of the prophetic books, we need to understand to whom a prophet spoke and the period of time when he did so.

The Prophets' Dual Ministry



The Prophets' Dual Ministry



The Prophets' Dual Ministry

The prophets sometimes preached with a double focus. Their messages often included events that were going to occur in the future. But their primary message addressed the circumstances of their own time. When prophets did announce events that were yet to come, their prophecies were looking forward from *their* time, but the majority of those messages are history to us. They warned the people of Israel or Judah that God would judge them for their disobedience, and sometimes those future judgments were spelled out with specific names and times. For instance, Jeremiah warned Judah that God would use the Babylonians to judge them. But he also announced that after seventy years God would release the Jews and return them to their land. For Judah and his listeners, those events were in Judah's future and both events happened. But we read Jeremiah's projections into the future as history because from our perspective the events occurred twenty-five hundred years ago.

A Closer Look at the Prophets

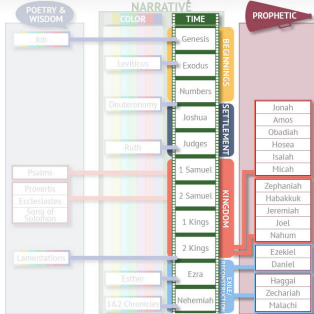
Their Chronology

A brief survey of a few prophets will help make the prophetic ministry a bit clearer. Because we are studying the Old Testament chronologically and building everything around its story, it will help to study the prophets that way as well. Sadly, we don't have time to tell all of their stories, but it is important to at least place them in their chronological setting. There are sixteen writing prophets and, while some are difficult to date precisely, this is generally the order in which they lived. The eighth century BC prophets were Jonah, Amos, Obadiah, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. In the seventh century, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Joel, and Nahum ministered. Ezekiel and Daniel lived during Judah's exile in the sixth century; and then Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi ministered to the returnees from exile, also in the sixth century.

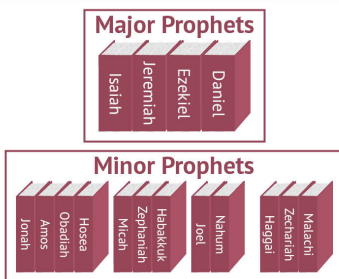
Major and Minor Prophets

There are two categories of writing prophets. The Major Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The other twelve, because their books are shorter, are referred to as the Minor Prophets.

A Closer Look at the Prophets



A Closer Look at the Prophets



The Prophets' Messages

Amos and Injustice

- A farmer from Judah.
- Called to preach against social injustice – the poor were going hungry while others lived lavishly.
- Preached against one of the two great sins for which God was about to judge Israel.



AUDIENCE

Northern Israel
8th century BC

The Prophets' Messages

Hosea and Idolatry

Sometimes prophets **acted out God's message** to show the people **how God viewed their sins**.



AUDIENCE

Northern Israel
8th century BC

The Prophets' Messages

Isaiah and His Kings

- "The Prince of the Writing Prophets"
- Often counseled the kings of Israel and Judah.
- Wrote some of the most beautiful literature ever composed.
- Lived during the time the Assyrians destroyed Israel in 722 BC.



AUDIENCE

Israel and Judah's kings
7th and 8th centuries BC

The Prophets' Messages

Amos and Injustice

A brief look at a few of God's writing prophets will give us a better sense of what the prophetic ministry was like. Amos prophesied to the northern nation of Israel in the eighth century BC. Amos was a farmer in Judah when God called him to go to Israel and preach against their rampant social injustice. The poor were going hungry while others in Israel lived lavish lives. Amos preached against one of the two great sins for which God was about to judge Israel.

Hosea and Idolatry

Hosea also ministered to Israel in the eighth century. He primarily warned them about their idolatry. Hosea's story is deeply moving. God asked him to enter into a disastrous marriage with an unfaithful woman and then used his failed marriage as an illustration of Israel's unfaithfulness to God. Hosea's heartbreak and his forgiveness and restoration of his wife demonstrated in graphic detail how God viewed Israel's adultery and His willingness to forgive, love, and restore Israel. This acting out of God's message was not unusual. He told Isaiah and Ezekiel to do some very strange things to show Israel and Judah how He viewed their lives.

Isaiah and His Kings

Isaiah is sometimes called the prince of writing prophets because of the majesty of his writing. While most prophets preached their messages to Israel or Judah's people, Isaiah was more of a counselor to Judah's kings. His frequent visits to kings Ahaz and Hezekiah are recorded both in 2 Kings and in Isaiah's own book. His writing is some of the most beautiful literature ever composed. He lived in Jerusalem during tumultuous times for both Israel and Judah and his messages were addressed to both nations. He lived during the time the Assyrians destroyed Israel in 722 BC.

Habakkuk and His Frustration

Habakkuk lived around 600 BC. He complained to God because He seemed to ignore the injustice and the idolatry Habakkuk saw in Judah. This prophet was impatient with God's seeming apathy toward His people's sin and challenged Him to do something. God

The Prophets' Messages

Habakkuk and His Frustration

Sometimes prophets didn't agree with God and found His messages troubling, but they proclaimed it anyway because they were God's messengers.

AUDIENCE

Judah
600bc



told Habakkuk He was going to use the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem as His judgment on the disobedient nation. Habakkuk was perplexed and challenged God again. His shocked response was, "Judah's bad, but the Babylonians are worse than we are."

Habakkuk illustrates the fact that sometimes the prophets didn't agree with God and found some of His messages troubling. But they were prophets. They could question and challenge God's word to them, but they proclaimed it anyway because they were God's messengers.

Jeremiah, the Weeping Prophet

The Prophets' Messages

Jeremiah, the Weeping Prophet

- Lived through the end of Judah's destruction and witnessed the sacking of the temple.
- Persecuted by the last three kings for warning them about the consequences of their sin.
- Never stopped proclaiming God's words to His people.

AUDIENCE

Judah
7th century BC



Jeremiah lived through the end of Judah's destruction and witnessed the Babylonians' sacking of God's temple. Judah's last three kings persecuted Jeremiah because he confronted them about their sin and warned them of its consequences. Instead of listening to Jeremiah, they threw him in prison and burned the scrolls on which he had written God's message. King Zedekiah even threw him into a cistern where he was left to die. But Jeremiah never stopped proclaiming God's words to God's people. He was a prophet; and that's what prophets did.

The Prophets' Messages

Ezekiel and the Exiles

- A contemporary of Jeremiah.
- Taken captive during the second deportation in 597 BC.

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The early Jewish exiles
6th century BC

*Ezekiel and the Exiles*

Ezekiel lived during Jeremiah's time. He had been taken captive during Nebuchadnezzar's second deportation of Judah's citizens to Babylon in 597. So even though he and Jeremiah were contemporaries, Ezekiel was living in Babylon and was God's prophet to the early exiles while Jeremiah was prophesying to Judah's citizens who were still living in Judah.

Daniel and the Royal Court

The Prophets' Messages

Daniel and the Royal Court

- A statesman who served the Babylonian and Persian rulers.
- Taken to Babylon in 605 BC.
- Not traditionally a prophet, but gave some amazing prophetic descriptions of the future.

AUDIENCE

Babylon and Persian courts
6th century BC

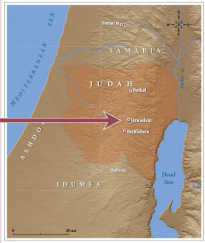


Daniel was a statesman who served the Babylonian and the Persian rulers. He too lived in Babylon. He was taken there after Nebuchadnezzar's first raid on Jerusalem in 605. He was not, in the traditional sense, a prophet. He didn't preach to Israel or Judah's people, but he had opportunity to speak for God in the Babylonian and Persian palaces. He is listed among the prophets because chapters 9–12 of his book contain some of the most amazing prophetic descriptions of the future we find anywhere in Scripture.

The Prophets' Messages

Haggai, Zechariah, and the Temple

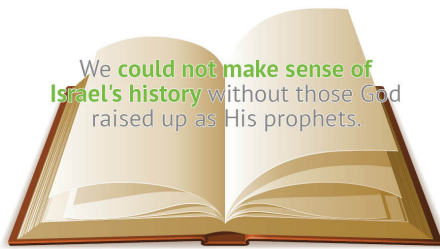
- Encouraged Judah's citizens to rebuild God's temple and obey and worship Him.



AUDIENCE

Reconstruction Era Judah
6th century BC

Conclusion



We could not make sense of
Israel's history without those God
raised up as His prophets.

Haggai, Zechariah, and the Temple

Haggai and Zechariah ministered during Judah's time of reconstruction. They encouraged Judah's citizens to rebuild God's temple and to obey and worship Him.

Conclusion

These prophets' stories were chosen to show the wide variety of circumstances surrounding their callings, lives, and ministries. We could not make sense of Israel's history without those God raised up as His prophets. They teach us essential facts about God and about ourselves. Their teachings, though ancient in origin, are eternally and essentially God's Word to every generation.