

Lesson #1: Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets

Prophets and Prophecy:

- Prophets were key figures in the Old Testament, serving as God's voice to his people.
- The Hebrew Word for prophet is "Nabi" which means "one who speaks" or "one who is called". Hence, the word is used to describe one who is chosen to announce the declarations of God. In Greek, the Word for Prophet is "Προφήτης" (Pro-phé-tees) which means "one who speaks on behalf of another."
- A Prophecy is a revelation of the divine; these revelations came mostly by dreams or visions and were often a way to deliver God's messages, warning, guidance and hope for salvation for His people.
- There are over 300 prophecies of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. The Dead Sea scrolls confirm that these were written prior to Christ's birth.
- Prophecies can have dual fulfillment. This emphasizes that they can have both a short-term fulfillment that happens soon thereafter in the original context as well as a long-term fulfillment often related to the Messianic prophecies and the second coming.

What are the characteristics of a Prophet:

1. **A Man of God**

- Prophets chosen by God were of righteous character and had a close relationship with God.

"And he said to him, "Look now, *there is* in this city a man of God, and *he is* an honorable man; all that he says surely comes to pass. So let us go there; perhaps he can show us the way that we should go." (1 Samuel 9:6)

2. **The Servant of the Lord**

- This description dates to the time of Moses and has become a standard way to describe all later prophets. Prophets are faithful servants of the Lord himself.

"Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments *and* My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets." (2 Kings 17:13)

3. **Messenger of God**

- This phrase is often used to describe post-exile prophets describing one of their main roles in passing on God's messages.

Did you know: Malachi is a Hebrew name meaning "My messenger" or "Messenger of God"

- This also draws attention to the fact that the source of the prophet's inspiration is from God the Holy Spirit and not himself.

"Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, spoke the Lord's message to the people, saying, *"I am with you," says the Lord.*" (Haggai 1:13)

4. A Watchman:

- A prophet also has the responsibility to watch over God's people and provide advice and warning, encouraging them to repent and seek their salvation.

"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore, hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me" (Ezekiel 3:17)

Key Timeline of Prophets in the Old Testament

722 BC: The fall of Samaria		586 BC: The fall of Jerusalem		538 BC: Return from Captivity		515 BC: The rebuilding of the Temple		455 BC: The rebuilding of the Wall	
Time Period		Key Prophets		Major Events					
Exodus and Wilderness		Moses, Aaron		The Exodus from Egypt, receiving the Law/commandments at Mount Sinai, wandering in the wilderness					
Conquest of Canaan		Joshua		Conquest of the Promised Land, settling of Israel					
Period of the Judges		Samuel, Deborah, Gideon		Israel’s cycle of sin, oppression, repentance, and deliverance by judges					
United Kingdom		Samuel, Nathan, David		The establishment of the monarchy, reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon, building of the Temple					
Divided Kingdom		Isaiah, Micha, Joel, Obadiah (Judah) Hosea, Amos, Elijah, Elisha (Isreal)		Israel splits into Israel (north) and Judah (south), Assyrian and Babylonian threats					
Fall of the Northern Kingdom (Ireal)		Amos, Hosea		The capital of Israel (Northern Kingdom) Samaria falls to Assyria (722 BC)					
Fall of Jerusalem & Babylonian Exile		Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Habakkuk, Nahum, Zephaniah		Fall of Jerusalem (586 BC), exile to Babylon, judgment for sin, hope for restoration					

Return from Captivity	Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi	Return from Babylonian exile, rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple, hope for the Messiah
Post-Captivity Era	Malachi	Spiritual renewal, anticipation of the coming of the Messiah

Did You Know: The difference between Major and Minor prophets lies not in the significance of the message but in the **length of their books**. There are also many other prophets in the Old Testament whose stories are recounted in books like Kings and Judges, but who didn't author their own books.

The 4 Major Prophets:

Prophet	Time Period and Setting*	Book in the Bible	Significance of Book
Isaiah	740-680 BC Before Captivity The Land of Canaan, Judah (The southern Kingdom)	66 Chapters Chapter 1-35: Rebuke and warning to the nations (Prophecies of Condemnation) Chapter 36-39: Historical events Chapters 40-66: Messianic prophecy (Prophecies of Comfort)	The book can be separated into 3 sections 1. God's judgement of the nations because of sin 2. God's salvation of Jerusalem from the hand of King Sennacherib 3. God's comfort for his people and promise of hope through the Messianic prophecies of the Christ who will save them. Relation to Christ: Christ is the suffering servant, meek and lowly and He is our Saviour.
Jeremiah	627 - 586 BC Before and during captivity The southern Kingdom	52 Chapters Chapters 1-33: Prophecies regarding Judah's captivity Chapters 34-45: the fall of Jerusalem Chapter 46-52: Historical accounts	The book presents a severe warning to the people regarding their sins. It also provides a historical account of the events of the captivity before, during and after the fall of Jerusalem. Relation to Christ: Christ is the Lord righteousness

		and prophecies of other nations	
Ezekiel	593 – 571 BC During captivity Babylon	48 chapters Chapter 1-24: Prophecies about Jerusalem's captivity Chapters 25-32: Prophecies about the nations (Gentiles) Chapters 33-39: Prophecies about returning from captivity Chapters 40-48: The New temple	The book presents a warning message to the people in captivity with the importance of repentance. After the fall at the hands of the Babylonians, the message of the book transforms to that of hope of returning, the rebuilding of the temple and the future glory. Ezekiel uses prophecies, parables, and signs to declare God's message. As a result, he is known as the prophet of symbolism. Relation to Christ: Christ sits on his Throne. Did you know: Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel all saw visions of Christ seated on a throne
Daniel	605-536 BC During captivity Babylon	14 Chapters Chapter 1-6: Historical accounts Chapter 7-12: Prophecies Chapters 13-14: The story of Susanna and Daniel in the lion's den	The book begins with a historical section about the events that took place with Daniel and his companions in Babylon and the favor he received by the Kings of Babylon and Persia. The book is filled with prophecies through visions regarding the future of the world and Israel emphasizing God's sovereignty over the nations and the people. Relation to Christ: The future of Christ's Kingdom

*All dates are an approximation based on various sources

Did You Know: The prophet Jeremiah also wrote Lamentations, which describes the fall of Jerusalem.

Lamentations is composed of 5 poems written in grief over Jerusalem that fell into the hands of the Babylonians, and the destruction of its temple due to sin and lack of repentance. Hence, Jeremiah is known as the weeping Prophet. In the fifth chapter, we see the nation pleading and asking for forgiveness and salvation.

The third chapter of Lamentations is read during the 12th hour of Good Friday which commemorates the burial of Jesus Christ

Chapter 1

Destruction of Jerusalem

Chapter 2

•The Wrath of the Lord on Jerusalem

Chapter 3

•Prayer for Mercy

Chapter 4

•The Siege of Jerusalem

Chapter 5

•Prayer for Return and seeking God

The 12 Minor Prophets:

Prophet	Time Period and Setting*	Book in the Bible	Significance of Book
Hosea	766-760 BC Before captivity The Northern Kingdom (Isreal)	14 chapters	<i>Relation to Christ:</i> Christ as a faithful husband The book is written through the story of Hosea's marriage with Gomer the Harlot. It is a symbolic picture of God's love and grace for his people despite their unfaithfulness as they turn to worshipping the Idols
Joel	835-830 BC Before captivity The Southern Kingdom (Judah)	3 Chapters	<i>Relation to Christ:</i> Christ pours out his Holy Spirit The Book of Joel presents a warning message to the Israelites for their sins in the form of a locust plague. This plague represented the army of enemies that will be coming against them and God's judgement. The book ends with a call for repentance and a promise of God's Holy Spirit upon mankind
Amos	760-750 BC Before captivity Bethel	9 Chapters	<i>Relation to Christ:</i> Christ is the saviour of all nations. The Book describes the coming judgement of Isreal for their sins. Amos criticized the empty, hypocritical, and hollow nature of Israel's worship. Despite their rituals and sacrifices, their hearts were far from God.
Obadiah	845 BC Before captivity Land of Canaan	1 Chapter	<i>Relation to Christ:</i> Christ is the salvation of His People. The Book declares Edom's destruction for its arrogance against Isreal. Edom is a nation that descended from Esau. This is the shortest Book in the Old Testament
Jonah	790-750 BC	4 Chapter	<i>Relation to Christ:</i> The buried and risen Christ.

	Before captivity Nineveh		This book highlights the repentance of the city of Nineveh. The book also emphasizes God's love for the Gentiles
Micah	740-700 BC Before captivity The Southern Kingdom	7 Chapters	<i>Relation to Christ:</i> Christ will be born in Bethlehem. Micah warns of judgment for injustice but also foretells the coming of a righteous ruler from Bethlehem and future peace.
Nahum	663-612 BC Before captivity Nineveh	3 Chapters	<i>Relation to Christ:</i> Christ is the preacher of peace. The Book discusses how the people of Nineveh once again returned to their sin and the worship of Idols despite their repentance after Jonah's visit. The people of Nineveh are warned and punished by the attack of foreign armies. Their greatness turned into guilt and their glory into ruin.
Habakkuk	612-605 BC Before captivity Jerusalem	3 Chapters	<i>Relation to Christ:</i> Christ conquers Satan. In this book, the prophet Habakkuk questions why God is allowing evil to occur to Judah. God answers that the punishment is coming at the hands of the Chaldeans to chasten his Unrepentant. When asked why he is using these sinners, God answers that he will discipline them too because of their pride and bloodshed
Zephaniah	640-609 HC Before captivity Jerusalem	3 Chapters	<i>Relation to Christ:</i> The Day of the Lord This Book outlines the judgement on Judah (The Southern Kingdom) due to their sins and discusses the "Day of the Lord". The Book concludes on a joyful note discussing the promises of a glorious future.

Haggai	520 BC After captivity Jerusalem	2 Chapters	<p>Relation to Christ: All the nations will desire Christ.</p> <p>This book is a message of encouragement for the people returning from captivity to complete the rebuilding of the temple and promises God's blessing if they obey.</p>
Zechariah	520-480 BC After captivity Jerusalem	14 Chapters	<p>Relation to Christ: Christ is the suffering, Messiah.</p> <p>This book is a message of encouragement for the people to continue rebuilding the temple of the world. It includes a number of prophetic visions and discusses the glorious future of Jerusalem through the coming Messiah.</p> <p>This book contains prophecies regarding Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey as well as his betrayal for 30 pieces of silver.</p>
Malachi	430-400 BC After captivity Jerusalem	4 Chapters	<p>Relation to Christ: Christ is the sun of righteousness.</p> <p>This book discusses Spiritual Commitment. It is a message to the people of Israel returning from captivity. The book opens with God reminding the people of His unwavering love for them, despite their unfaithfulness. Malachi calls the people to repentance, urging them to return to the Lord and follow His commandments. The prophet addresses various issues, including infidelity, mixed marriages, justice, and true worship.</p> <p>One of the most significant parts of Malachi is the prophecy of a messenger who will prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. This is interpreted in the Coptic Orthodox tradition as a prophecy of John the Baptist, who would prepare the way for Jesus Christ.</p> <p><i>"Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. (Malachi 3:1)</i></p>

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Summary of Key Prophetic Themes in the Old Testament

A. A call for Repentance

- **Key Verse:** "Now therefore, return to me, says the Lord of hosts, that I may return to you." (Zechariah 1:3)
- The prophets consistently called the people to repentance, warning them of impending judgment if they did not turn from their sinful ways.
- **Example:** Jonah's message to Nineveh was a call for repentance before destruction (Jonah 3:4-10).

B. Hope for Salvation

- Prophets often spoke of a future time of restoration, where God would bring salvation and peace to His people.
- **Key Verse:** "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and He shall reign as king and deal wisely." (Jeremiah 23:5)
- Many prophets foretold the coming of a Messiah who would bring salvation to Israel and to the world (e.g., Isaiah 9:6-7).

C. The Coming Messiah

- The prophets made significant prophecies about the coming Messiah who would bring redemption to God's people.
- **Key Verse:** "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6)

d. The Day of the Lord

- A significant theme in the prophets is the "Day of the Lord," a time of judgment and salvation.
 - **Zephaniah 1:14-18** and **Joel 2:1-2** both emphasize this apocalyptic event.

"14 The great day of the Lord is near;
It is near and hastens quickly.
The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter;
There the mighty men shall cry out.
15 That day is a day of wrath,
A day of trouble and distress,
A day of devastation and desolation,
A day of darkness and gloominess,
A day of clouds and thick darkness,
16 A day of trumpet and alarm
Against the fortified cities
And against the high towers." (Zephaniah 1: 14-16)