

INTRODUCTION:

The Greek word for prophecy, *propheteia*, comes from two Greek words, *pro*, meaning “forth,” and *phemi*, meaning “to speak.” It means to speak forth the mind of God. According to this definition, all Scripture is in a sense prophecy. In the New Testament Peter reminds us of this saying, ***“But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”*** (2 Peter 1:20-21). The English word “prophet” is derived from the Greek *prophetes*. In classical Greek, *mantis* is the ecstatic announcer of oracles, and *prophetes* is their sober-minded interpreter, who makes the dreams, visions, or enigmatic utterances of the frenzied *mantis* intelligible. The *prophetes*, accordingly, is not a predictor, but one who speaks forth that which he has received from the divine Spirit. The prefix *pro* is not temporal. The prophet speaks for, or in behalf of, another; he is the mouthpiece or the spokesman of God. He is a forth-teller rather than a fore-teller. Likewise, the Hebrew word *nabi*, which is translated “prophet,” means one who announces. It seems also to have been used in a comprehensive sense. In the Hebrew Scriptures Abraham is called a prophet (Gen. 20:7). Between him and God there was direct personal communication, with him was the secret of the Lord, to him God revealed Himself and His purposes (Gen. 15:1-18; 18:17), he was able to teach his descendants the true knowledge of God (Gen. 18:19), and he had power of intercession with God (Gen. 18:23-32). Miriam, who expressly claims that the Lord had spoken by her, was a prophetess (Exo. 15:20; Numbers 12:2, 6). Aaron as the spokesman of Moses is called his prophet in that he was the intermediary between Moses and Pharaoh (Exo. 7:1; 4:16). The *nabi*, or prophet, was a person qualified by God to be His spokesman to men. And this is the fundamental idea which underlies the term as used in Deut. 18:18: ***“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.”*** The prophet was a part of his environment, used the language of his time, and prophesied in the contemporary historical situation.

Many of the books of the Old Testament bear the names of prophets but there are many more prophets contained in the Bible than those entitled in books of the Bible. For example: Moses, Elijah, Elisha and many others qualify by definition as prophets but no

biblical book is entitled with their name. Instead, the record of their deeds and prophetic utterances are contained in other books of the Bible—many of which we classify as historical books. Most of the accounts of prophets whose names do not appear in biblical book titles can be found in Judges, 1st and 2nd Kings, and 1st and 2nd Chronicles. The fact that some books of the Bible entitled prophet’s names while many of the greatest prophets are not titled has caused many to be confused about who should be considered a prophet. For example, in this study I was asked to conduct a Bible study on the prophets of the Bible. Does this mean I should conduct a study of the books of the Bible which bear prophets names or on all of the prophets of the Bible regardless of where they appear in Scripture? By the definition already discussed above, the list of prophets contained in the Bible would be very long. Therefore, for the sake of this initial study of the prophets we will limit our study primarily to those listed as Books of the Bible. These will fall into two groups—Major Prophets and Minor Prophets. We will also add five of the prophets listed in 1st and 2nd Kings and 2nd Chronicles.

The chart on the next page will help clarify which books we are studying and how they fit into the larger prophetic writings found in the Old Testament (OT). The first column lists the old Hebrew “Rabbinic Canon” which breaks the OT down into 24 books. It creates three groups of “prophetic books.” The first group is entitled: “The Former Prophets” and includes accounts of the earliest prophets, which include: Joshua, Deborah, Samuel, Elijah, Micaiah, Elisha, Oded, Huldah and others of the 8th and 9th century BC. In both the Greek Septuagint version of the OT and our modern Christian Canon we classify these books as “history” rather than as “prophetic books.” Our “Major Prophets” and “Minor Prophets” books generally correspond, respectively, to “The Latter Prophets” and “The Twelve” as they are listed in the “Rabbinic Canon.” The exception is that we add “Lamentations” (believed by many to have been written by Jeremiah) and “Daniel” to our list of “Major Prophets.” In the “Rabbinic Canon” these two books are listed under “The Writings” which is a collection of poetry, Festival Scrolls and history. The books we will be studying in this series of Bible studies will be limited to those shown in yellow (Major) and green (Minor) in the chart. (*See complete list on page 4.*)

COMPARISON OF LISTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS		
RABBINIC CANON 24 BOOKS	SEPTUAGINT 53 BOOKS	ROMAN CATHOLIC OLD TESTAMENT 46 BOOKS
The Law Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Law Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Law Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy
The Prophets The Former Prophets Joshua Judges 1-2 Samuel 1-2 Kings The Latter Prophets Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel The Twelve Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi	History Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Kingdoms (1 Samuel) 2 Kingdoms (2 Samuel) 3 Kingdoms (1 Kings) 4 Kingdoms (2 Kings) 1 Paralipomena (1 Chronicles) 2 Paralipomena (2 Chronicles) 1 Esdras (Apocryphal Ezra) 2 Esdras (Ezra-Nehemiah) Esther (with Apocryphal additions) Judith Tobit 1 Maccabees 2 Maccabees 3 Maccabees 4 Maccabees Poetry Psalms Odes (including the prayer of Manasseh) Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Songs Job Wisdom (of Solomon) Sirach (Ecclesiasticus or The Wisdom of Jesus the son of Sirach) Psalms of Solomon Prophecy The Twelve Prophets Hosea Amos Micah Joel Obadiah Jonah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi Isaiah Jeremiah Baruch Lamentations Letter of Jeremiah Ezekiel Daniel (with apocryphal additions, including the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Children, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon)	History Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Samuel (1 Kingdoms) 2 Samuel (2 Kingdoms) 1 Kings (3 Kingdoms) 2 Kings (4 Kingdoms) 1 Chronicles (1 Paralipomena) 2 Chronicles (2 Paralipomena) Ezra (1 Esdras) Nehemiah (2 Esdras) Tobit Judith Esther 1 Maccabees 2 Maccabees Poetry Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Songs Wisdom of Solomon Ecclesiasticus (The Wisdom of Jesus the son of Sirach) Prophecy Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Baruch (including the Letter of Jeremiah) Ezekiel Daniel Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi Appendix The Prayer of Manasseh The two apocryphal books of Esdras
The Writings Poetry Psalms Proverbs Job Rolls—“the Festival Scrolls” Song of Songs Ruth Lamentations Ecclesiastes Esther Others (History) Daniel Ezra-Nehemiah 1-2 Chronicles		

The Canonical Books of the Old Testament *

- Books of Law
- Books of History
- Books of Poetry and Wisdom
- Books of the Major Prophets
- Books of the Minor Prophets

* Grouped according to the Christian canon

THE PROPHETS IN HISTORY (9th—5th century B.C.)					
Prophet	Approximate Dates (B.C.)	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	Judgment on Ahab; Proof of prophecy	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	786-746	Gath Hepher	2 Kgs 14:25; Jonah	God’s universal concern	Jonah 4:11
Hosea	786-746	Israel	Hosea	God’s unquenchable love	Hos 11:8-9
Amos	760-750	Tekoa	Amos	God’s call for justice and righteousness	Amos 5:24
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 and justice	Mic 6:8
Oded	733	Samaria	2 Chr 28:9-11	Do not go beyond God’s command	2 Chr 28:9
Nahum	686-612	Elkosh	Nahum	God’s jealousy protects His people	Nah 1:2-3
Zephaniah	640-621	?	Zephaniah	Hope for the humble righteous	Zeph 2:3
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
Habakkuk	608-598	?	Habakkuk	God calls for faithfulness	Hab 2:4
Ezekiel	593–571	Babylon	Ezekiel	Future hope for new community of worship	Ezek 37:12-13
Obadiah	580	Jerusalem	Obadiah	Doom on Edom to bring God’s kingdom	Obad 21
Joel	539-331	Jerusalem	Joel	Call to repent and experience God’s Spirit	Joel 2:28-29
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 will lead to God’s universal rule	Zech 14:9
Malachi	500-450	Jerusalem	Malachi	Honor God and wait for His righteousness	Mal 4:2

The chart on the previous page lists the prophets we will study in this Bible study series. The chart also includes the approximate date range when the prophet was active, their location or home, the book or Bible passages that address them, their central teaching, and a key verse that supports their teaching. Each week we will study the teachings of one or more prophets as time allows. We will address them in the same order in which they are listed here, which is chronological order beginning with the earliest and working forward in time. It is important to note that many of the dates are highly disputed and/or are very speculative, but this should not matter because our focus will not be on history but spiritual guidance for our lives.

SELECTION:

The prophets did not inherit the office, nor receive it by human appointment, but were chosen, prepared, and called of God; and the call was often soul-searching (Exo. 3:1—4:17; 1 Sam. 3:1-20; Jer. 1:4-10; and, Ezek. 1:1—3:15). The word of the Lord came to them in various ways. They were commanded to proclaim it. They were accredited by signs, by the fulfillment of their predictions, and by the conformity of their teaching to the law. And God held man accountable for obedience to their word (Deut. 13:1-5; 18:18-20).

The call of the prophets came directly from God Himself (Amos 7:15). The prophet was aware of a definite moment when the call came. Moses was called at the bush to his comprehensive work (Exo. 3:1—4:17). Prophets received their call from God in different ways but the call was always made clear by God even though the prophet himself might initially doubt his calling.

That the prophet was to be raised up from the people of Israel did not prevent God from sending a dream to a Philistine, an Egyptian, a Midianite, a Chaldean, a Roman (Gen. 20:6; 41:1; Judg. 7:13; Dan. 2:1; Matt. 27:19). Even Balaam, who was a soothsayer, and as such was invited by the king of Moab to curse Israel, was temporarily used by God. These foreigners were in momentary contact with the Kingdom of God. In the case of Balaam we see a man acting as the mouthpiece of God (Num., chs. 22-24).

QUALIFICATIONS:

One of the qualifications was prophetic vision (1 Sam. 3:1). Looked at in this aspect, the prophet was sometimes called as seer (1 Sam. 9:9; Isa. 30:10). And when this was the main aspect in which he was regarded or known by the people, seer was the designation in vogue. This was the case for a considerable period in the early history of Israel. Samuel and Gad and Iddo were known by this title. But Samuel ceased to be merely a seer to whom the people resorted when they would inquire of the Lord, desiring to know God's will as to duty, or seeking direction in national affairs, or craving light upon private matters.

Samuel went out among men as an authoritative teacher of the nation sent by God, and this public proclamation was the distinctive idea in prophecy (1 Sam. 10:10-13; 19:20). The teaching function, as seen in Moses, became prominent again; and beginning with Samuel and his followers, and with renewed force several centuries later, the prophet became a constant presence in the national life, an ambassador of God to Israel, an authoritative preacher of righteousness, an interpreter of past and present history on its moral side, an admonisher of the consequences which God the Judge has annexed to conduct, a forewarner of the certainty of the divine judgment on sin, and a fosterer of fidelity toward God. To make known the secret counsel of God, as did Nathan when he forbade David to build the Temple and announced God's purpose to establish David's throne forever, remained functions of the prophet; but they were a comparatively small part of his work.

Spiritually the prophets were prepared to receive divine communications. They were holy men, men who were surrendered to God's service and who lived in communion with God, men of habitual prayer (like Samuel, 1 Sam. 7:5; 8:6; 12:23; 15:11), who retired at times to their watchtower, that is, composed their minds and gave themselves up to quiet contemplation, in order to wait for revelation (Isa. 21:8; Hab. 2:1). Moses withdrew for 40 days and nights into the quiet and solitude of Mt. Sinai for communion with God (Exo. 24:18). Occasionally, in the early period, music was employed to stimulate or awaken

religious feeling (1 Sam. 10:5), or to soothe the mind and attune the heart for meditation, when the will of the Lord was sought (2 Kings 3:15).

TEACHINGS:

The prophets were taught of the Spirit of God (1 Kings 22:24; 2 Chron. 15:1; 24:20; Neh. 9:30; Ezek. 11:5; Joel 2:28; Micah 3:8; Zech. 7:12; 1 Peter 1:10-11). In this God worked in accordance with the psychological nature of man. An audible voice or an angelic messenger occasionally came (Num. 7:89; 1 Sam. 3:4; Dan. 9:21), but the instruction was ordinarily imparted by dreams, visions, and inward suggestions recognized by the prophets as not of themselves. They were not under the permanent influence of the Spirit. The word of the Lord came unto them. They waited for revelation (Lev. 24:12). And their natural mental discernment is distinguished from the divine word that came to them. Samuel's private thought is distinguished from God's (1 Sam. 16:6-7). Nathan at first approved of David's purpose to build a temple for the Lord, but afterward he told the king that God had forbidden its construction (2 Sam. 7:3). The prophets did not exercise the prophetic power at all times, but when God told them to speak.

FALSE PROPHETS:

Besides heathen prophets who spoke in the name of an idol (Deut. 18:20; 1 Kings 18:19; Jer. 2:8; 23:13), there were false prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord (Jer. 23:16-32). They were of 2 classes: first, conscious impostors, enticed to claim the gift by the consideration and influence that true prophets enjoyed, and courted on account of their smooth words (1 Kings 22:5-28; Ezek. 13:17, 19; Micah 3:11; Zech. 13:4); and probably, second, sincere and even godly men, whose doctrine might be based on the law of God, but who were self-deceived in that they had not been called to the prophetic office by God. Tests were therefore established for distinguishing the true from the false. The true prophet was recognized: (1) By signs (Exo. 4:8; Isa. 7:11, 14). But signs alone were not sufficient, for they might occasionally come to pass accidentally or be wrought by artifice (Deut. 13:1-2; Exo. 7:11, 22; 2 Thess. 2:9). (2) By the fulfillment of his predictions (Deut. 18:21-22). This credential gains in evidencing

power as time goes on and the historic events and developments take place that the prophet had foretold. (3) By his teaching (Deut. 13:1-5; Isa. 8:20). If the doctrine taught by the claimant of a call from God led men astray, the speaker was manifestly not a man of God. The true prophet's teaching was found to agree with the doctrine of the law concerning God, His nature, character, and worship, and concerning the conduct of man.

References:

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