

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPHETS

1A THE DEFINITION OF A PROPHET

One who receives divine revelation from God, and infallibly communicates that divine revelation to the people as a spokesman for God.

The fact that he receives and speaks divine revelation from God is what separates him from one who is merely a teacher. A teacher takes the revelation provided by the prophet and conveys the truth it contains to the people.

Other terms used: "Seer," one who sees visions. "Man of God," emphasizing his holy calling, moral conduct, and divine ministry. "Watchman," one who sounded forth God's warnings against sin and of impending judgment.

1 Sa 9:9 (Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to enquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer.)

10 Then said Saul to his servant, Well said; come, let us go. So they went unto the city where the man of God was.

Eze 3:17 Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.

Note: A priest is one who represents men before God, but a prophet is one who represents God before men.

Jesus Christ as Mediator fulfills both of these roles.

2A THE DUTIES OF A PROPHET

1. It involved forthtelling: telling forth the mind of God regarding the behavior of the people.

2. It involved foretelling: declaring ahead of time what will occur in the future.

So - prophets, by means of direct revelation, told the people what God thought of their present conduct, and what God decreed would come to pass in the future.

3A THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OFFICE

Prophets existed from the beginning of time, Noah being a very notable example. Moses was also a prophet, Deu 18:15 The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;

However, under Samuel, the prophetic office was more clearly defined and the message more widely disseminated through the “schools of the prophets,” who were disciples of the prophets who learned their message and who conveyed it to the people. They did not train to become prophets, because God alone designated and called prophets. Rather, these men, called “the sons of the prophets,” were the messengers of the messages received by the prophets.

4A THE DATES AND DIVISIONS OF THE WRITING PROPHETS

Note: There are two classifications of biblical prophets - the speaking prophets, such as Elijah and Elisha, who wrote no books; and the writing prophets, like Jeremiah and Isaiah, who composed written books.

The chronological order of the writing prophets
(Dates are approximate, covering about 400 years)

Prophets of the Northern kingdom of Israel

Jonah	862 B.C.
Amos	787
Hosea	785-725

Prophets of the Southern kingdom of Judah

Obadiah	887
Joel	800
Isaiah	760-698 Israel goes into captivity to Assyria 721 B.C.
Micah	750-710
Nahum	713
Habakkuk	630
Zephaniah	626
Jeremiah	629-588
Lamentations	587 Judah goes into captivity to Babylon 587 B.C.

Prophets of the exile while Judah is in Babylon

Ezekiel	595-574
Daniel	607-534

Prophets after the return to the land

Haggai	520
Zechariah	520-518
Malachi	397

Note: Among the writing prophets, there are the major prophets - Isaiah, Jeremiah, (and Lamentations), Ezekiel, and Daniel. They are called the major prophets not because they are more important than the others, but simply because they wrote longer books. The remainder of the prophets are called the minor prophets, because they wrote shorter books. The prophetic books are arranged according to these two groupings in our Bibles.

All of the writing Prophets ministered during the period of the decline and fall of the Hebrew nation. Thus the predominate note of rebuke, judgment, and wrath which they contain. Don't grow tired of this note. It manifests God's love for His people, that He would expend so much time and effort to seek to turn them from the wrath to come.

Understanding the historical context in which they wrote is critical to understanding their message and its application. This is why their message must be read in light of 1st and 2nd Kings, 2nd Chronicles, and Ezra and Nehemiah, because that is when they prophesied.

THE PERIOD OF THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

1B Date: 931 – 722 B.C.

2B Scripture: 1 Kings 12 to 2 Kings 17, 2 Chronicles 10 – 29.

3B Prophets: Isaiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah

THE PERIOD OF THE SURVIVING KINGDOM – JUDAH

1B Date: 722 – 586 B.C.

2B Scripture: 2 Kings 18-25, 2 Chronicles 30-36.

3B Prophets: Jeremiah, Lamentations, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah

THE PERIOD OF THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

1B Date: 586 – 538 B.C.

2B Scripture: None.

3B Prophets: Ezekiel and Daniel

THE PERIOD OF RESTORATION TO THE LAND

1B Date: 538 – 400 B.C.

2B Scripture: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.

3B Prophets: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

However, in the midst of the warnings and woe which they pronounce, they also have the glorious promise of the Redeemer, of the New Covenant that God will make with His people, of the world wide inclusion of the gentiles into the kingdom, and of the ultimate deliverance from all sin in the New Heavens and the New Earth. The collapse of the Hebrew Nation and the ruin of Jerusalem and the Temple did not mean that God's plans had failed, or that His purposes had been thwarted. There was yet a glorious age to come through the first and second coming of Christ.

The suffering Messiah of the first coming, Isaiah 53:1-9, and the reigning Messiah of the second coming, Isaiah 11:1-16, were the grand theme of the prophets.

So - Prophets were men raised up by God in times of declension and apostasy to call Israel back to God. They were God's spokesmen to the heart and the conscience of the nation. And while there was a political and social aspect to the prophet's message, the political and social aspects of the prophet's message was always secondary. First and foremost, the prophet's message was always spiritual. He rebuked idolatry. He announced the will of God to men, and He called for complete obedience to that will. He spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and therefore with divine authority. "Thus saith the Lord" was his message as God's spokesman conveying God's revelation with God's authority.