

Introduction to the Prophets



There are 16 books of the prophets:

4 “major” prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah (with Lamentations), Ezekiel, Daniel.

12 “minor” prophets (from the Latin for small rather than because insignificant!): Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

These prophets speak before, during and after the Israel and Judean exiles, covering a period of over 300 years and fill in much of the detail of the situations during the reigns of the kings.

How people think prophet’s look (this one’s Amos). They were probably younger!

Some hints for reading the prophetic books

It’s useful to place the prophet into the OT story line using:

Dates (e.g. Isaiah 6:1, 2 Kings 15:21-23)

People (e.g. Hosea 4:1, 15)

It’s good to remember that prophecy is also a type of literature:

Poetry/oracle (e.g. Is 1-35 and 40-66!).

Repetitive, cyclical style.

Like any other book it’s useful to summarise the message

E.g. Daniel – the Lord reigns everywhere over everyone

A Summary of the Sixteen Prophets

PROPHET	WHEN	TO WHOM	ABOUT
Isaiah	740-700 BC	Judah	Exile and future return
Jeremiah	627-582 BC	Judah	The exile to come and future return
Ezekiel	593-571 BC	Judah and then exiles	Fall of Jerusalem and exile. A new shepherd, new life and a new temple
Daniel	587-525 BC	Exiles	God in control even in exile, gospel for nations, God's eternal kingdom will come.

Minor Prophets			
Hosea	747-724 BC	Israel under Jereboam	Unfaithful Israel, faithful God. Exile, not a new exodus
Joel	?	?	The Day of the Lord, salvation open to all
Amos	750 BC	Israel under Jereboam	Israel's lack of true worship will be judged. However there is hope.
Obadiah	~587 BC	Judah (especially Jerusalem)	Edom will be destroyed, God's people rescued.
Jonah	750BC	Nineveh when Jereboam is king of Israel	The nation must repent
Micah	725-700 BC	Judah under kings Jotham to Hezekiah	Judgement on sin, salvation for God's people
Nahum	~640BC	Assyria and Judah	Judgement on nations. God is in control.
Habakkuk	between 626 -587BC	Judah	God is just to use pagan nations to judge Israel.
Zephaniah	before 621 BC	Judah, before Josiah's reforms	God's judgement on Judah and her enemies, but there is glorious hope for Jerusalem
Post Exile Prophets			
Haggai	520BC	Israel after exile	Rebuild the temple
Zechariah	520-519BC	Israel after exile	Rebuild Jerusalem. God is coming as king. Jerusalem will be centre of God's plan for the world.
Malachi	After 520BC	Israel after exile	Give God your all. The Lord is coming.

The Prophets Herald Something New

- 1 Re-affirm the previous covenants to Abraham and David e.g. Isaiah 9:6-7.
- 2 A renewal that will enable God's people to obey Him e.g. Ezekiel 36.
- 3 The prophets speak of this renewal as if a new exodus e.g. Isaiah 40-42.
- 4 The return is like a resurrection e.g. Ezekiel 37.
- 5 The people will be ruled by the promised king and shepherd e.g. Ezekiel 34.
- 6 There will be a new covenant e.g. Jeremiah 31:31-34.
- 7 There will even be a new creation, like Eden e.g. Isaiah 11:6-9.
- 8 Blessing will come to the world e.g. Isaiah 2.
- 9 A new temple; Ezekiel 40.
- 10 Achieved by the servant of God on whom the Spirit comes e.g. Isaiah 42:1

Isaiah



Who wrote it?

More than one Isaiah?

When?

As with Ecclesiastes it is likely much of the material comes from the Solomonic period, though there may have been some later editing.

The Structure of Isaiah

The main division

1-39

40-66

A more detailed structure

1-39

1-12

13-36

36-39

40-66

The Message of Isaiah

1 The book of the King (1-35)

- Baaaaad Kings (generally) Eg. 7:1-2

- God is still really in charge Eg 6

- God's rule will be restored by the true King 11: 1-5

Application: You can and must trust God – not Kings, not Idols

2 Transition (36-39)

We really need a decent King and a proper rescue!

3 The Book of the Servant

Babylonian threat/exile

God's right response to idolatry

The servant steps in and brings:

- protection from judgement for the weak (42)
- glorifies God in his people's place (49)
- trusts God even through suffering (50)
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- upholds righteousness by taking punishment (53)

Application: Isaiah 50: 10-11

4 The Book of the Conqueror

Righteous people awaiting redemption from a sinful world

The Lord puts on his armour and defeats his enemies

Applications

Know God: The Holy one of Israel

Idols promise to do what God does but are stupid (40: 9-20)

King, Servant, Warrior – could Jesus be more perfect for us?