

## The Prophets

### Characteristics of the Prophets

The prophets of the Bible were God's spokesmen divinely chosen by Him to receive and deliver His messages. Prophets were also called seers ("see-ers") which denoted somebody who was able to perceive things that were not in the natural realm of sight and hearing. These watchmen, messengers, and servants of the Lord were called by the Lord and given insight into past, present, and future events. God communicated to the prophets in various ways including dreams, visions, angels, nature, miracles, and an actual audible voice. One role of the prophet was to warn the people of coming danger and judgment so that the people would have time to change their ways and avert this outcome. While this role should have belonged to the priests and even the kings of Israel and Judah as God's appointed leaders, the priests and kings often fell into sin and idolatry, corrupting their calling and leading the people astray. Therefore the prophets were raised up as God's chosen messengers, calling the people to repent and return to the Lord. The prophets were unique and diverse, coming from all walks of life. Even so, they were all committed to the Lord and the message that He wanted them to share.

Samuel, often considered to be the first real prophet, founded an order of prophets with schools. Samuel and many other prophets were known as the "Oral" prophets because they left no written record of their ministry. Some "Oral" Prophets include Nathan, Ahijah, Elijah, Elisha, Oded, and Huldah. The "Written" or "Literary" Prophets are those whose writings are included in the Old Testament such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Nahum, Jonah, Micah, et al... These prophets can further be distinguish as major and minor prophets merely as a distinction between the length of their writings. The "Literary" Prophets covered a time frame of approximately 400 years from the ninth to the fifth century BC.

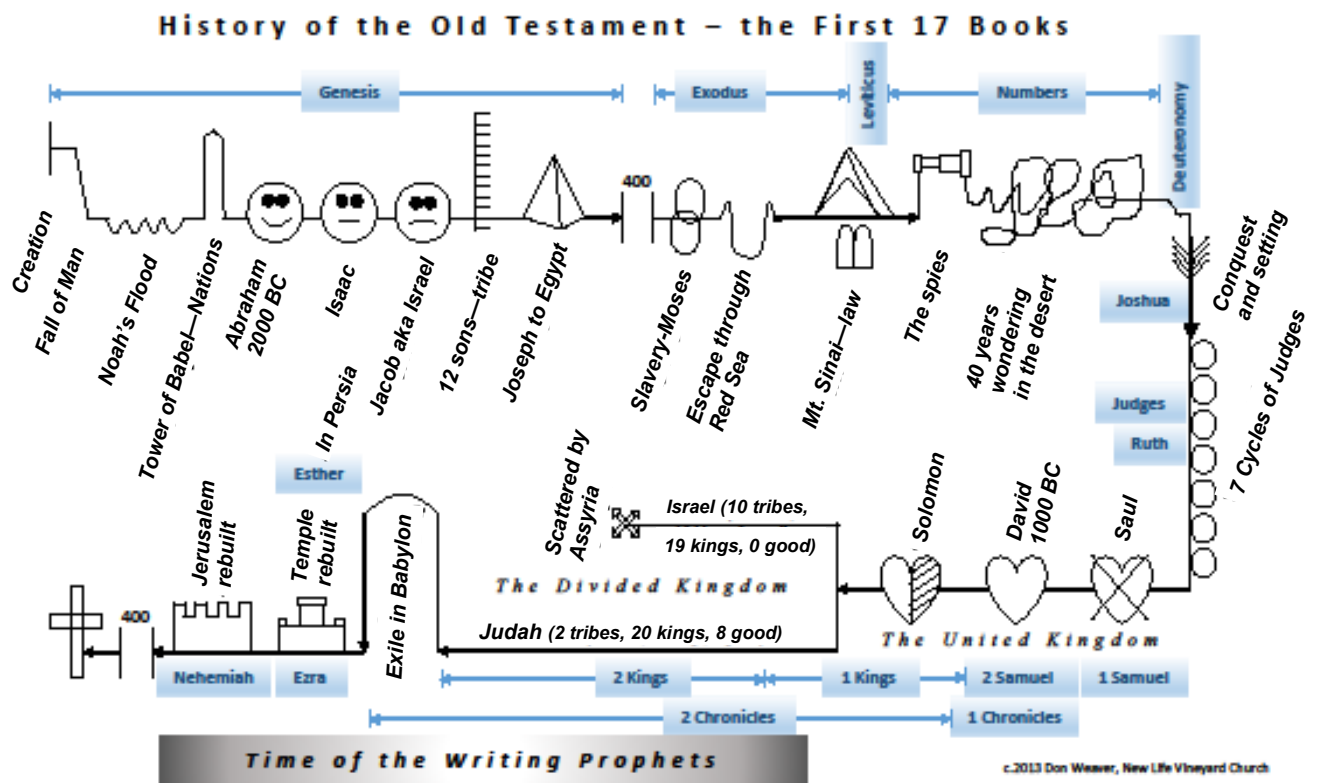
### The Message of the Prophets

There were four main eras in which the prophets shared the prophecies of the Lord. They spoke to a United Nation of Israel, during the time of the Divided Kingdom, while the Jews were in exile, and post-exile to a restored nation. The message of the prophets was one of *fore-telling* of future events as well as *forth-telling* of God's word for the present using lessons from the past. The prophets did not water down their message nor compromise God's Truth. They called sin for what it was and rebuked kings, priests, and people for their sinful and wicked practices. The prophets reminded the people of God's character and of His kindness, holiness, mercy, sovereignty, and love. They urged the people to return to God and trust and obey Him once again. If the people did not humble themselves and repent, they would surely face God's coming judgment against their wickedness. The people's choices today would shape their future of tomorrow. The message of the prophets also had a Predictive Element in that they spoke of the coming Messiah as well as the future Day of the Lord when sin would have its final judgment and evil would be abolished for all time. Throughout it all, their message clearly shows the sovereignty and grace of God whose plans will always prevail. Even though the people were condemned because of their sin, God in His mercy and grace was going to provide a way of restoration and a magnificent future with Him.

### True vs. False Prophets

As with anything that the Lord does, the devil will counterfeit it, and so it is with prophets (Matthew 24:11). There are several characteristics that will distinguish a true prophet from a false prophet. First, whatever was prophesied has to come true without fail (Deut. 18:22). Next, the message of a prophet will encourage obedience and love to the One, True God (Deut. 13:1-5). Nothing the prophet says should ever contradict the Word of God because God does not contradict Himself (Jeremiah 23:16-22). True prophets are uncompromising and call sin, sin and speak out against social evils (Isaiah 1:1-17, 21-23 & Amos 2:6-8). They speak the words God has given them and stand firm against great opposition and unpopularity (Jeremiah 1:17-19), constant in their obedience to God even in extreme circumstances (Hosea 1:2-3). Finally, true prophets spend much time in prayer and communion with God (Daniel 2:17-23; 6:4-13).

*\*Material taken from various sources.*



Placing the Old Testament Prophets					
Pre-exilic Prophets			Exilic Prophets	Post-exilic Prophets	
9th Century BC	8th Century BC	7th Century BC	6th Century BC		5th Century BC
Written to Foreign nations	<b>Obadiah</b> (to Edom c. 848-841 BC)	<b>Jonah</b> (to Nineveh c. 782-753 BC)	<b>Nahum</b> (to Nineveh c. 664-654)		
Written to Israel	<b>Hosea</b> (c. 755-715 BC)  <b>Amos</b> (c. 760-753 BC)				
Written to Judah	<b>Joel</b> (c. 835 BC)	<b>Micah</b> (c. 735-700 BC)  <b>Isaiah</b> (c. 740-680 BC)	<b>Habakkuk</b> (c. 609-605 BC)  <b>Zephaniah</b> (c. 632-628 BC)  <b>Jeremiah</b> (c. 627-580 BC)	<b>Daniel</b> (c. 605-536 BC)  <b>Ezekiel</b> (c. 592-570 BC)	<b>Haggai</b> (c. 520 BC)  <b>Zechariah</b> (c. 520-480 BC)  <b>Malachi</b> (c. 432-424 BC)