

Prophets in the Old Testament

Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the **Prophets**; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

Matthew 7:12 "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the **Prophets**."

Matthew 11:13 "For all the **prophets** and the Law prophesied until John.

Matthew 22:40 "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the **Prophets**."

Luke 16:29 "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the **Prophets**; let them hear them.'

Luke 24:27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the **prophets**, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

Luke 24:44 Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the **Prophets** and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

John 1:45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the **Prophets** wrote-- Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Acts 24:14 "But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the **Prophets**;

Acts 26:22 "So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the **Prophets** and Moses said was going to take place;

Acts 28:23 When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the **Prophets**, from morning until evening.

Prophetism

1. Vocabulary and Semantics

1. Hebrew

1. nābiy' נְבִיא is the classical word for prophet in Hebrew. Scholarship is divided over whether the word נְבִיא is derived from an active or a passive root. Actively it is used in the sense of a “speaker” or “proclaimer.” Passively (possibly from Akkadian nabi'um) it carries the sense of “the called.”¹ It is the word that προφητης is used most to translate. The word (nominal form) occurs 315 times in the OT.

2. rō'eh רֹאֶה This term is used for Samuel in 1 Sam 9. v. 9 tells that the word is an older one for נְבִיא. At that time it was translated as seer. It occurs also in 2 Chronicles (referring to Samuel) and Isaiah. It occurs 12 times in the OT.

3. hōzeh הֹזֵה This term is most often translated seer² and is used most often as a title (2Sam 24.11). At times it is used interchangeably with נְבִיא (Amos 7.12,14). It occurs 17 times in the OT.

4. 'ish 'elohim אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים This is a term often applied by another to the prophet as a sign of recognition of whom the one is who sends the men referred to נְבִיא. It occurs 76 times and is used 36 times to refer to Elisha.³

2. The first person called a ‘prophet’ in the Bible was Abraham (Gen 20.7).

2. Greek προφητη from προ + φημι to speak before.

Definition - A Prophet is one called by יהוה (YHWH) to speak directly for him to his people.

At times this aspect takes on priestly type functions, as is found in the above Genesis account and the role of Abraham to Abimelech.

A prophet is to be distinguished from both a priest and a king. These two offices a man may be born into. Not so with a prophet— it is a called office. ‘The work of a prophet is not the fulfilling of an office, but the performance of a function.’

Covenant בְּרִית־ דִּיאֹתָקָה Sinai Ex 24; Leviticus 26; Deut 28 (blessings and curses).

Many times the prophets calling was to call Yhwh's people back to his covenant with them. Their pronouncements of judgement were in relation to the breaking of the covenant, especially as found in Leviticus 26 & Deuteronomy 28.

¹TDNT, VI: 796.

²It has the sense of one who beholds rather than just sees. BDB has it one who “perceives with the inner vision.”

³ZPEB, s.v. prophet

The conventional aspect of words. Always look for the meaning of words to be found in the place and time and conventions of the passage. Note the variety of uses of *tongues* in the NT. For the text it means languages, in the modern charismatic movement they have turned it into an unknown, non-existent heavenly language, all because of the unfortunate translation of the Greek γλῶσσα into the English tongues. Also, the subjective aspect of history and historiography.

Questions concerning the nature of the office of prophet

1. Called a Prophet - a short but adequate enumeration

1. Abraham - Gen 20.7
2. Aaron - Ex. 7.1
3. Moses -
4. Seventy elders of Moses - Num. 11.24ff.
5. Prophets of 1 Sam 10.5ff. (Saul's encounter)
6. Prophets of Baal - 1 Kings 18.20ff.
7. Cultic Prophets - 1 Kings 22.5ff.;
8. Sons of the prophets - 2 Kings 2.3ff.
9. Daniel (important in canonical considerations) – Matt. 24.15, Josephus *Ant.* 10.249, 268

2. The call of a Prophet

1. Samuel - 1 Samuel 3.1-10 (called from his sleep)
2. Isaiah 6 (called while serving in the Temple)
3. Jeremiah 1.4ff. (from the womb!)
4. Ezekiel 1.4 (visions)
5. Daniel 2 (called by circumstances)
6. Hosea 1 (called to marry a whore as an example)
7. Joel 1 (the word of YHVH came to him)
8. Amos 1 (visions) Neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet
9. Obadiah (visions)
10. Jonah (the word of YHVH came to him and he fled from it, but did not escape)
11. Micah 1.1 (the word of YHVH came to him)
12. Nahum 1 (a burden/oracle and a vision)
13. Habakkuk 1 (a burden/oracle and a vision)
14. Zephaniah 1 (the word of YHVH came to him)
15. Haggai 1 (the word of YHVH came to Zerubbabel by him)
16. Zechariah 1.1 (the word of YHVH came to him)
17. Malachi 1.1 (the oracle/burden of the Word of YHVH to Israel through Malachi)

3. Were the prophets ecstatics?

1. Num. 11.25-29 - 70 elders of Moses
2. 1 Sam 10.1-13 - Saul and the Prophets
3. 1 Sam 19.18-24 - Saul's evil spirit
4. 1 Kings 18.29 - Prophets of Baal (this is the foreign archetype)

5. Jeremiah 29:26 “The LORD has made you priest instead of Jehoiada the priest, to be the overseer in the house of the LORD over every madman who prophesies, to put him in the stocks and in the iron collar.”

4. Getting the message across

1. YHVH to prophet
 1. Prophetic Consciousness
 2. Audible voice
 3. Internal voice
 4. Visions
2. Prophet to people
 1. Orally - prophetic proclamation
 2. Description of the visions
 3. Symbolic actions
 4. Wrote

1. General Prophetic Messages – not exhaustive

1. Pre-exilic
 1. God - him only shall you worship. Direct relationship to the Levitical passages. This involves the movement of the King and nation away from right and proper worship of Yhvh and right and proper relationship with neighbors.
 2. Israel/Judah - they have abandoned their covenant relationship with יהוה their God. They have Canaanized their society and religion. Much worship of Asherah on the high places. 2 Kings 18 and the prophets of Baal.
 3. Future - judgement, restoration.
2. Exilic and Post-exilic
 1. Hope will follow doom. Isaiah 1-39 and 40-66.
 2. Call to repentance so as not to repeat the mistakes of their fathers.
 3. Eschatology - YHVH assures history

2. The end of prophecy?

1. Malachi is the last prophetic book?
2. Acts 11.27-28, “Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.²⁸ One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius.”
3. Acts 13.1 “Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.
4. NT - I Cor 12.10 to the close of the canon, Revelation.
5. Acts 15:32 Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.
6. Rev. 22.18

Has prophecy ceased? In the OT, there does not seem to be any passage that expressly declares that the time of prophecy is over. However, the Jews apparently grew to understand that the prophetic office had ceased (I Macc. 9.27; Josephus *Contra Apion* 1.41) but still hoped for a prophet to arise (I Macc. 4.46, 14.41).

However, to declare an end to prophecy at Malachi in the OT is to draw a sharp line between the testaments, to divide God's Word. Prophecy had not ceased, it was what it was 400 years from the time of Malachi to that of John—a prophet in the fullest sense as any other prophet of scripture (from either side of the Annunciation).

We can perhaps agree that there seems to have been an end to prophecy at Revelation. But, unless the Word specifically says so, I am loath to declare prophecy dead, especially in light of Revelation 11. At the same time and in the same breath I will say that there shall in no wise be added to scripture anything else and any prophecy declared will in no wise contradict the Word (Deut 13.1-5). If anyone comes declaring a word of prophecy contrary to YHVH's Word, he is a liar and not a prophet. Also, while being loath to declare dead that which the Word does not, at the same time I will say that there has been no evidence to my knowledge of a prophetic message for the whole church since the writing of Revelation. All of this must keep in mind the test of

Deut 18.20-22.

²⁰ 'But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.'

²¹ "You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?'

²² "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

1. Interpretation of Prophecy –

1. Contextual interpretation, when, where, to whom and why was the prophetic message originally delivered.
2. Being able to understand the semiotics of the message - what do the symbols mean? Are they explained in the passage or a related passage? This goes beyond the mere recognition of simile or metaphor. cf. esp. Dan 2 & 7.
3. Be able to recognize *sensus plenior* aspects of some prophecies.

To be aware of *sensus plenior* is to realize that there is the possibility of more significance to a Biblical passage than was consciously apparent to the original author (cf. esp. Is 7.14— Matt 1.23 [note also $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\eta\gamma\iota\sigma\tau\iota\kappa\acute{\alpha}$ $\pi\alpha\rho\theta\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$ distinction]), and more than can be gained by strict grammatico-historical exegesis. Such is the nature of divine inspiration that the authors of Scripture were themselves often not conscious of the fullest significance and final application of what they wrote. This fuller sense of the Old Testament can be seen only in retrospect and in the light of New Testament fulfillment.⁴

⁴Donald Hagner, "The Old Testament in the New Testament," *Interpreting the Word of God*, ed. Samuel J. Schultz and Morris Inch (Chicago: Moody, 1976), 92, as quoted in Virkler, 26, n. 12.

2 Sam 7.12-17

Isaiah 7.10-16 (Matt 1.23)

1. Place of the Prophets in the canon

1. *Baba Bathra*

2. Josephus

3. Masoretes

4. Former and Later Prophets

Deuteronomy ends with this statement concerning Moses-

וְלֹא־קָם נָבִיא עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמֹשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר יָדָעוּ יְהוָה פְּנִים אֶל־פְּנִים:	καὶ οὐκ ἀνέστη ἔτι προφήτης ἐν Ἰσραὴλ ὡς Μωϋσῆς ὃν ἔγνω κύριος αὐτὸν πρόσωπον κατὰ πρόσωπον	And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face,
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A couple of questions here.

1. When was this statement written? This would determine who the possible candidates would be with whom to compare to Moses to notice how they did not measure up in that they did not know the LORD face to face.

2. Does this statement anticipate or require that we look for a prophet like Moses? Is that the Deut. 18.15 qualifier—face to face intimacy with God? And whom would fulfill that anticipation? Elijah, John the Baptist, Jesus? Matt. 11.9 (Luke 1.76), Jesus affirms that John the Baptist was a prophet. Jesus indicates that he himself is a prophet Luke 13.33, Luke 24.19 (road to Emmaus).

Many want to affirm that the Jews considered the prophetic office over. Sailhamer argues that 'it is worthwhile to note here that the concept of the cessation of prophecy was part and parcel with the concept of the closing of the OT Canon.

Chronological Table of the Near East 750-550 BC

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Date	Israel	Prophets	Judah	Egypt	Assyria	Babylonia	Medo-Persia
750	Menahem 752-742 Pekahiah 742-740 Pekah 740-732	Jonah 770 Amos 760 Hosea 760-730 Isaiah 740-700 Micah 737-690	Uzziah 783-742 Jotham 750-735	Osorkon IV Py c.747-716	Tiglath-pileser III 744-727	Nabonassar 747-734 Nabu-nadin-zeri 733-732 Nabu-mukin-zeri 731-729 Tiglath-pileser III 728-727	
	Hoshea 732-722		Ahaz 735-715		Shalmaneser V 726-722 Sargon II 721-705	Shalmaneser V 726-722 Merodach-baladan II 721-710 Sargon II 709-705 Sennacherib 704-703	
700	FALL OF SAMARIA 722		Hezekiah 715-687	Shabako c. 716-702	Sennacherib 704-681 <i>Seige of Jerusalem 701</i> Esarhaddon 680-669	Marduk-zakir-shumi II 703 Merodach-baladan II 703 Bel-ibni 702-700 Ashur-nadin shumi 699-694 Nergal-ushezib 693 Mushezib-Marduk 692-689 Sennacherib 688-681 Ashurbanipal 668 Shamash-shuma-ukin 667-648	
650		Zephaniah 627 Habakkuk 630 Nahum 650 Jeremiah 627-580	Amon 642-640 Josiah 640-609	Tantamani 664-656 Necho I 672-664 26th DYNASTY Psammetichus I 664-610	Ashurbanipal 668-627 Ashur-etel-ilani Sin-shumu-lishir 626 Sin-sharra-ishkun 621		
600		Daniel 605-530 Ezekiel 593-570	Jehoahaz 609 Jehoiakim 609-598 Jehoiachin 598-597 Zedekiah 597-587 FALL OF JERUSALEM 586		FALL OF NINEVEH 612 Ahur-uballit II 611-609	Kandalanu 647-627 Nabopolassar 625-605	Birth of Cyrus the Great 601
550				Necho II 610-595 Psammetichus II 595-589 Amasis 570-526		<i>Battle of Carchemish 605</i> Nebuchadnezzar II 604-562 1st Babylonian Deportation 605 2nd Deportation 597	Cyrus overthrows Astyages and takes over the Median Empire 550
500		Haggai 520 Zechariah 520-518 Joel 500 Obadiah 500 Malachi 433	Temple Rebuilt	Psammetichus III 526-525		Amel-marduk 561-560 Neriglassar 559-556 Labashi-marduk 556 Nabonidus 555-539 <i>Belshazzar</i> (co-regent with Nabo.) FALL OF BABYLON 539	Invasion of Babylon 538