

DIGGING DEEPER WEEK 1

The Profile of a Prophet



God called men and women as prophets with the specific purpose of delivering God's messages to His people. Samuel served as the last judge before the monarchy, and he also spoke prophetically as God's mouthpiece to the Jews during the time of transition from rule by judges to that of kings. When the nation of Israel asked for a king, God answered them providing Saul as their first leader. Throughout the time when kings ruled in Israel during the United Kingdom and later during the Divided Kingdom, God sent prophets to speak His messages to the people. Often the prophets are divided into categories based on when their ministry occurred.

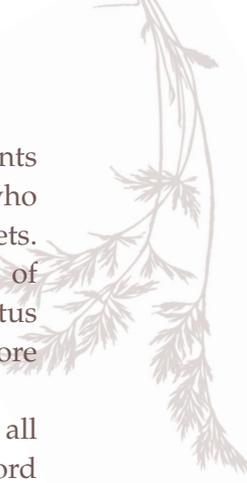
1. The Standard Preexilic Prophets. "The prophets included in this group are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. They are described as 'preexilic' because their times are located prior to (or during) the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of 586 B.C." These prophets are referred to as standard because their messages contain similar themes of disobedience, judgment, and hope.¹

2. The Non-standard Preexilic Prophets. Obadiah, Nahum, and Jonah are preexilic prophets but they address foreign nations instead of Israel and Judah.²

3. The Postexilic Prophets and Daniel. "Typically, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are identified as the 'postexilic' prophets because they delivered their messages after the return of the exiles to Jerusalem following the Babylonian/Persian exile."³ Daniel gets placed in this group because his message lines up most closely with the postexilic prophets.

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Not all prophets authored Old Testament books. The early prophetic accounts appear in First and Second Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. The prophets who wrote Old Testament books fall into two categories of Major and Minor Prophets. *Major* or *minor* reveals nothing of their importance but speaks to the length of their writings. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel retain major prophet status simply because their books are longer, while the Minor Prophets provide more concise accounts.

Prophets lived in direct communication with the Creator God who knows all things past, present, and future. These forthtellers spoke the future as the Lord directed them. Prophets often recorded visions of common objects that had spiritual meanings. They used demonstrative physical actions to communicate the messages God gave them. Isaiah walked around naked (Isaiah 20:3). Hosea married a prostitute to demonstrate Israel's unfaithfulness (Hosea 1:2). Jeremiah wore a wooden yoke on his neck in the streets to tell the people of upcoming captivity (Jeremiah 27:2).

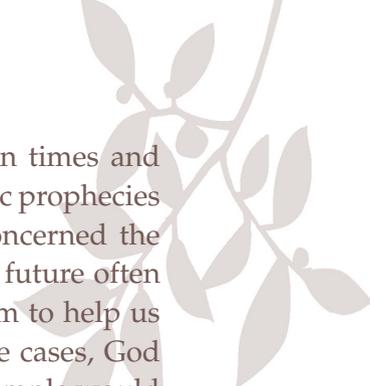
"The word prophet is from the Hebrew...(*nabi*). The derivation of this word is a matter of controversy, but the essential idea in the word is that of an *authorized spokesman*."⁴ One source explains, "A person became a prophet by becoming aware that God was speaking to him and having to transmit the message. The consciousness came in different ways and was communicated through the prophet's own unique personality. Jeremiah says simply that the hand of the Lord touched him and words were put into his mouth (Jeremiah 1:9)."⁵ Prophets served as special representatives for God along with the priests. Their role differed from the priests in that prophets boldly proclaimed messages as God supernaturally gave them information rather than focusing on the daily routines of animal sacrifice and worship at the temple. A prophet's message provided a warning from God—an attempt to call His people out of sin and into close relationship with Him. The prophet's words usually included three elements:

Past Sin – The prophet specifically named the sins of the nation.

Present Responsibility – The prophet issued a call to repentance and described the consequences of continuing in sin.

Future Hope – The prophet gave the hope of blessing for those who turned from sin and back to the Lord.





The messages of the prophets related to the people of their own times and circumstances and also echoed far into the future, with many messianic prophecies quoted in the New Testament. Identifying whether the message concerned the prophet's lifetime or referred to an event hundreds of years into the future often presents a challenge. Sometimes these timelines overlap. A great term to help us understand the fulfillment of prophecy is "already, not yet." In these cases, God imbedded a dual meaning through the prophetic words. A simple example would be that Jesus said His kingdom was now, and He also said to pray "thy kingdom come." His kingdom began already in His first coming as a fulfillment, but it also remains not yet because He will be coming again for a greater fulfillment of His kingdom.

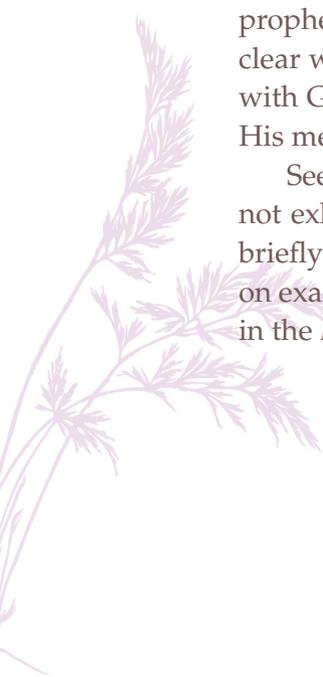
Prophets differed from their peers in many ways. Chuck Swindoll identifies eight distinguishing characteristics of prophets:

1. Uncompromising individualism
2. Standing alone
3. God's mouthpiece
4. Rugged determination
5. Prayer and communion
6. Outspoken critic of their times
7. Absolute obedience
8. Revealer of future events⁶

In a technical sense, no one carries the title of prophet today. However, in the general sense, God calls many men and women to boldly speak His messages among nations that refuse to listen.

Jesus stands out from among the rest as prophet, priest, and king. He clearly fits the eight characteristics above as the final prophet sent from God. Much more than just a prophet delivering God's message, Jesus fulfills what all the other prophets spoke. Revelation 19:10b says, "For the essence of *prophecy* is to give a clear witness for *Jesus*" (emphasis added). He is the only way to true relationship with God. As we follow and trust Him, Jesus helps us grow and calls us to speak His message to others.

See the following chart for a quick reference on the prophets. (Note: This list is not exhaustive; prophets during the United Kingdom and those mentioned only briefly in Scripture are not included. Dates are approximations since scholars differ on exact timeframes. These dates are from the introduction to each prophetic book in the *Life Application Study Bible* ⁷.)



Prophet	Approximate Date (B.C.)	Country Addressed in Prophecy	Kings Who Ruled During Their Prophecy	Category
Joel	835-796?	Judah (Southern Kingdom)	Joash	Standard Preexilic Minor prophet
Obadiah	unknown	Edom	?	Non-standard Preexilic Minor prophet
Jonah	785-753	Assyria	Adad-nirari III, Shalmaneser IV, Ashur-dan III, Ashur-nirari V	Non-standard Preexilic Minor prophet
Amos	760-750	Israel	Jeroboam II	Standard Preexilic Minor prophet
Hosea	753-715	Israel (prophesied through the captivity to Assyria in 722)	Jeroboam II, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, Hoshea	Standard Preexilic Minor prophet
Isaiah	740-681?	Judah (prophesied to Judah during Israel's exile)	Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh	Standard Preexilic Major prophet
Micah	742-687?	Judah	Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah	Standard Preexilic Minor prophet
Zephaniah	640-621?	Judah	Josiah	Standard Preexilic Minor prophet
Nahum	663-612?	Assyria	Ashurbanipal	Nonstandard Preexilic Minor prophet
Jeremiah	627-586?	Judah (prophesied through the captivity in 586-?)	Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah	Standard Preexilic Major prophet
Daniel	605-535	Exiles in Babylon	Nebuchadnezzar	Postexilic Major prophet

Prophet	Approximate Date (B.C.)	Country Addressed in Prophecy	Kings Who Ruled During Their Prophecy	Category
Habakkuk	612-588	Judah	Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah	Standard Preexilic Minor prophet
Ezekiel	593-571	Exiles in Babylon	Nebuchadnezzar	Standard Preexilic Major prophet
Haggai	520-515	Judah (returning from captivity)	Darius I (Persian Empire)	Postexilic Minor prophet
Zechariah	520-480	Judah (returning from captivity)	Darius I (Persian Empire)	Postexilic Minor prophet
Malachi	430?	Judah	Darius I, Xerxes I, Artaxerxes I (Persian Empire)	Postexilic Minor prophet

1. J. Daniel Hays. *The Message of the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 63.
2. Ibid. 69.
3. Ibid. 71.
4. From "The Major Prophets," <https://bible.org/seriespage/major-prophets>.
5. Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* (Chicago: Moody, 2005), 330.
6. "Profile of a Prophet Part 1," narrated by Charles Swindoll. Insight for Living Canada, September 1, 2011. <http://www.insightforliving.ca/broadcast/gods-masterwork/GM3D06>.
7. *Life Application Study Bible*, New Living Translation, Timelines for the prophetic books (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1996).

