

Prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures

Session 3: Prophets of Israel

Note: All scripture passages are taken from the New International Version (2011), unless otherwise specified.

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1 Defining the Period

As noted in our last session, the kingdom period in Israel's history begins when, at the request of the people and God's command, Samuel anoints Saul to be their first king. Most Christian interpreters who receive the Biblical account as historically accurate date this event around 1050 BC.

After the death of Saul, it took David some time to reunite the tribes under his leadership, but the kingdom then remained united during the rest of his reign and that of his son Solomon in 930 BC. At that point, the kingdom divided in two, the northern kingdom, known as Israel, and the southern kingdom known as Judah. The following map illustrates this division.



The divided kingdom ends when Assyria defeats and effectively eradicates the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC, forcing many of its residents into exile.

In this session, therefore, we will address prophets who were based out of this northern kingdom of Israel, during both the united and divided kingdom periods. We will focus on the following individuals:

- Nathan
- Elijah
- Elisha
- Jonah

- Amos
- Hosea

2 Nathan

Nathan, the prophet, first appears during the reign of King David. We have no record of his calling, but he figures prominently in key moments in David's reign and in the anointing of David's son, Solomon.

2.1 Dates

Active during the united kingdom of David and Solomon, c. 1010-930 BC

2.2 Responds to David's Plans for a Temple & Announces God's Everlasting Covenant

David shared his plans to build a temple for the LORD in his new capital city of Jerusalem (2 Samuel 7:1-17; 1 Chronicles 17:1-15). Initially, Nathan commends the plan, but God corrects it. David's son will be the one to build it. Nevertheless, God extends this promise to David through His prophet:

"Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever. Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation." 2 Samuel 7:16-17

2.3 Confronts David regarding His Sin

When David abused his power to take Bathsheba, who was married to Uriah, and then arranged for Uriah to be killed on the front lines of battle, God revealed his actions to Nathan and charged the prophet to confront the king. 2 Samuel 12:1-25

"Then Nathan said to David, 'You are the man!'" 2 Samuel 12:7

2.4 Works with Bathsheba to Ensure Solomon's Succession to the Throne

As David neared death, his son, Adonijah, took steps to usurp the throne. The prophet, Nathan, however, together with Bathsheba and two other officials, preempted these plans and had David name Solomon as his legitimate successor.

"King David said, 'Call in Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet and Benaiah son of Jehoiada.' When they came before the king, he said to them: 'Take your lord's servants with you and have Solomon my son mount my own mule and take him down to Gihon. There have Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel. Blow the trumpet and shout, 'Long live King Solomon!'" 1 Kings 1:32-34

2.5 Other interesting mentions

- David apparently names one of his sons after the prophet, 2 Samuel 5:14; 1 Chronicles 3:5; 14:4.
- Written Records:

*"As for the events of King David's reign, from beginning to end, they are written in the records of Samuel the seer, **the records of Nathan the prophet** and the records of Gad the seer, together with the details of his reign and power, and the circumstances that surrounded him and Israel*

and the kingdoms of all the other lands.” 1 Chronicles 29:29-30; compare 2 Chronicles 9:29, regarding written records of Solomon’s reign.

- Helped to draft plans for the temple:

*“He stationed the Levites in the temple of the LORD with cymbals, harps and lyres in the way prescribed by David and Gad the king’s seer and **Nathan the prophet**; this was commanded by the LORD through his prophets.” 2 Chronicles 29:25*

2.6 Role in God’s Story

Nathan continues the prophetic role of Samuel, demonstrating that every king is subject to the authority of God’s Word. In God’s political system, leaders are appointed to serve both Him and His people.

3 Elijah

3.1 Dates

Active in the northern Kingdom of Israel during the reigns of Ahab, Ahaziah and Jehoram (Joram), c. 875-848 BC. See 1 Kings 17 – 2 Kings 2

3.2 Prophetic Predictions

- Three-year drought, 1 Kings 17:1
- Anointing of Hazael and Jehu as future kings, 1 Kings 18:15-17
- Judgment on Ahab and Jezebel, 1 Kings 21
- Judgment on Ahaziah, 1 Kings 1

3.3 Miraculous Signs

- Fed by ravens, 1 Kings 17:2-6
- Food for a widow and her son, 1 Kings 17:16
- Raises the widow’s son from death, 1 Kings 17:17-24
- Calls down fire from heaven, 1 Kings 18
- Outruns Ahab to Jezreel, 1 Kings 18:46
- Experiences wind, earthquake and fire on Mt Horeb, 1 Kings 19
- Calls down fire upon Ahaziah’s soldiers, 2 Kings 1
- Parts the waters of the Jordan River, 2 Kings 2:8
- Taken up into heaven in a whirlwind, with chariots and horses of fire, 2 Kings 2:11

3.4 New Testament References

The New Testament explicitly refers to Elijah 29 times within 29 verses, and 27 of those are in the Gospels.

- John the Baptist as the “Elijah who was to come,” Matthew 11:14; compare Malachi 4:5:

“See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.” Malachi 4:5 (last verse in the collection of prophets, and last verse of the Old Testament, as we have it arranged.)

“The disciples asked him, ‘Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?’ Jesus replied, ‘To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.’ Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.” Matthew 17:10-12; compare

Mark 6:14-16; 9:11-13; Luke 1:11-17; 9:7-9

However, also note this passage:

“Now this was John’s testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, ‘I am not the Messiah.’ They asked him, ‘Then who are you? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the Prophet?’ He answered, ‘No.’” John 1:19-21

- Some see the “Son of Man”, or Jesus, as Elijah, Matthew 16:14; Mark 8:27-28; Luke 9:18-19
- A prophet not accepted in his hometown, Luke 4:24-26
- Appears with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration, Matthew 17:3-4; Mark 9:4-5; Luke 9:28-33
- Some mistake Jesus’s Aramaic words on the cross, *“Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?”* (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”), as a cry for Elijah to come and save Him. Matthew 27:45-49; Mark 15:35-36
- Paul cites God’s response to Elijah’s complaint that he alone was left among the prophets, Romans 11:1-6
- James refers to Elijah as an example of effective prayer, James 5:17-18
- Some interpreters identify Elijah as one of the two, unnamed witnesses described in Revelation 11:3-10; following Jewish traditions that see Elijah as one who will come to initiate the restoration of God’s Kingdom.

3.5 Role in God’s Story

Elijah provides a theological context for the judgment that the northern kingdom will continually experience until it is eventually destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC. His prophecies that are fulfilled in the short term, and the miraculous signs that God does through him, are all meant to prove God’s sovereignty over history. His miraculous translation into heaven leaves open the possibility of his reappearance, and the prophet Malachi confirms his reappearance on *“that great and dreadful day of the LORD”* (Malachi 4:5). Jesus teaches that this prophecy is at least partially fulfilled by John the Baptist who shares the Spirit of Elijah.

4 Elisha

4.1 Dates

Active in the northern Kingdom of Israel during the reigns of Ahab, Ahaziah, Jehoram (Joram), Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Jehoash, c. 848-797 BC, See 1 Kings 19 – 2 Kings 2-9

4.2 Successor to Elijah

“Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet.” 1 Kings 19:16

“So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. ‘Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye,’ he said, ‘and then I will come with you.’ ‘Go back,’ Elijah replied. ‘What have I done to you?’ So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant.” 1 Kings 19:19-21

“When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?’ ‘Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,’ Elisha replied. ‘You have asked a difficult thing,’ Elijah said, ‘yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise, it will not.’” 2 Kings 2:9-10.

4.3 Prophetic Predictions

- Judah, Israel, and Edom’s victory over Moab, 2 Kings 3
- Reveals location of the Aramean armies, 2 Kings 6:8–23
- Food supplies restored after a siege, the prince will not be able to eat it, 2 Kings 7
- Seven-year famine, 2 Kings 8:1–3; compare Elijah’s prediction of a drought, 1 Kings 17:1
- Death of Ben-Hadad, King of Aram, 2 Kings 8:7–15
- Jehoash’s victory over Aram, 2 Kings 13:14–20

4.4 Miraculous Signs

- Parts the Jordan River with Elijah’s cloak, 2 Kings 2:14, which Elijah also parted, 2 Kings 2:8
- Heals contaminated water, 2 Kings 2:19-22
- Forty-three youths judged for insulting him, 2 Kings 2:23-25; compare the two groups of fifty soldiers who are judged for coming to take Elijah to the king, 1 Kings 10.
- Multiplies a widow’s oil, 2 Kings 4:1-7; compare Elijah’s similar miracle, 1 Kings 17:16
- Raises a widow’s son from the dead, 2 Kings 4:8-37; compare Elijah’s similar miracle, 1 Kings 17:17-24
- Purifies contaminated food, 2 Kings 4:38–41
- Feeds 100 people, 2 Kings 4:42-44; compare the way that Elijah is fed by ravens, 1 Kings 17:2-6
- Heals Naaman, an Aramean army commander 2 Kings 5; recalled by Jesus, Luke 4:27
- Judges his servant Gehazi with leprosy, 2 Kings 5
- Causes an ax head to float, 2 Kings 6:5–7
- Causes Aramean soldiers first to lose and then to recover their sight, 2 Kings 6:18–20
- A dead man resuscitated when his body touches Elisha’s bones, 2 Kings 13:21

4.5 Role in God’s Story

As Joshua succeeds Moses, so Elisha succeeds Elijah. Both successors repeat but also extend and complete the work begun by their predecessor. In significant ways, they prefigure Jesus, who is preceded by John the Baptist. The miracles of Jesus are anticipated in the miracles of Elisha.

5 Jonah

5.1 Dates

c. 785-775 BC, during the successful reign of Jeroboam II in the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

5.2 His Calling

“The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: ‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.’” Jonah 1:1-2

Nineveh was the capital of Israel’s archenemy, Assyria. Fifty years or so after Jonah’s ministry, in 722 BC, Assyria would entirely destroy the northern Kingdom of Israel, deporting large numbers of its people to other nations.

5.3 His Journeys



Source: NIV Study Bible Notes

5.4 His Message

“Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, ‘Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.’” Jonah 3:4

A simple, straight-forward message, five words in Hebrew.

5.5 Two Historical Objections

- The “great fish”
- Assyrian “repentance”

5.6 New Testament References

“He answered, ‘A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.’”

Matthew 12:39-40; compare Matthew 16:4; Luke 11:29-30

*“The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here.”
Matthew 12:41; compare Luke 11:32*

5.7 Role in God’s Story

God extends His mercy and forgiveness extends to all people, and God’s called people are responsible to proclaim that message to everyone, even among their enemies.

6 Amos

6.1 Dates

c. 760-750 BC, during the end Jeroboam II’s reign and the tumultuous transition to the reign of Menahem in the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

6.2 His Call

“The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa—the vision he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel.” Amos 1:1-2; compare Zechariah 14:5 which also refers to an earthquake during the reign of Uzziah

“Archaeological excavations at Hazor seem to have yielded evidence for an earthquake which has been dated at approximately 760 BC.” (McComiskey, T. E., 1988, *Amos, Book Of*. In Baker encyclopedia of the Bible (Vol. 1, p. 78). Baker Book House.

“But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’” Amos 7:15

6.3 His Journey



Source: Adapted from NIV Study Bible

6.4 His Message

God is planning judgment for all nations. Both Judah and Israel will be included, because they commit the same sins. Emphasis is placed on sins of injustice, such as these charges against Israel:

“This is what the LORD says: ‘For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not relent. They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name. They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines.’” Amos 2:6-8

God's people are doubly judged because they cloak their evil with a veil of religious ceremony:

“Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years. Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings— boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do,’ declares the Sovereign LORD.” Amos 4:4

Because of their unfaithfulness, the “Day of the Lord” which the people assumed would be a day of restoration would in fact become a reckoning day of judgment:

“Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD! Why do you long for the day of the LORD? That day will be darkness, not light.” Amos 4:5

At one point, Amaziah the priest at the sanctuary in Bethel denounces Amos to the King of Israel, but Amos resists him, and the LORD reaffirms the judgments that He has pronounced through His prophet. (Amos 7)

The account closes, however, with a word of hope:

“In that day I will restore David’s fallen shelter— I will repair its broken walls and restore its ruins— and will rebuild it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name,’ declares the LORD, who will do these things.” Amos 9:11-12

6.5 Role in God's Story

God calls another shepherd to humble a king, foreseeing especially the destruction of the Northern Kingdom within the following 30 years – enough time for them to reconsider and repent, which the majority of the leadership refused to do. In particular, the injustice in their land indicts them, notwithstanding their religious trappings.

Amos' message is another of those flashing arrows carved into the record, so that when the predicted events occur, people could see God's hand in them and own their responsibility for their failures. At the same time, God sovereignly promises that this would not be the end of His story.

7 Hosea

7.1 Dates

c. 750-715 BC, during which he would have witnessed the fall of the northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC, when it is conquered by the armies of Assyria. His ministry may have overlapped or come right on the heels of Amos's ministry.

7.2 His Call

One of the most unique ministries among the prophets, he is called to act out the message of God as a living example of the prophetic message. His life becomes his message, a theme that repeats itself especially in the ministries of Isaiah, Jeremiah and, especially, Ezekiel. In this case, God calls him to marry a woman named, Gomer, who is lost in her unfaithful lifestyle. Hosea must then model God's love for His people through the way that he continues to pursue Gomer:

“When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, ‘Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD.’” Hosea 1:2

7.3 His Message

The story of Hosea’s relationship with Gomer illustrates God’s relationship with His people. It is a story of unfaithfulness (4:1–7:16), judgment (8:1–10:15), and, ultimately promised restoration (11:1–14:9). The end of the story is clearly stated at the beginning of the book:

“Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ they will be called ‘children of the living God.’ The people of Judah and the people of Israel will come together; they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land.... Say of your brothers, ‘My people,’ and of your sisters, ‘My loved one.’” Hosea 1:10-2:1, cited in Romans 9:25

The last verse of the book provides its moral lesson:

*“Who is wise? Let them realize these things. Who is discerning? Let them understand. The ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.”
Hosea 14:9*

7.4 His Role in God’s Story

Hosea’s story summarizes Israel’s story, and that story, in turn illustrates the human story. By disregarding God and His ways, the human experience is trapped in a cycle of disobedience and judgment. Nevertheless, God does not give up on His promises. He still loves faithfully, though we are unfaithful, and He will act to redeem us, as Hosea redeemed Gomer from slavery.

During his lifetime, Hosea experiences Assyria’s desolation of Israel, but his message assures us that He is still not done with His people. Those who are *“not His people”* will again become *“His people”*. (Hosea 1:10)

8 What’s the Point?

God has given us every opportunity to break the cycle of disobedience and destruction in which we are trapped. But are we willing to break out of it?