

Prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures

Session 1: An Introduction

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

Session Outline

1	Our Plan for the Course	1
2	What is a “Prophet”?	2
2.1	A Few Key Passages	2
2.2	Primary Hebrew Term: נָבִיא (nabiy’ /naw·bee/)	2
2.3	Related Terms	3
2.4	Working Definition	3
3	Who Are the Prophets?	4
3.1	Prophets Whose Names Are Attached to Collections within the Hebrew Scriptures	4
3.2	Other Named Prophets within the Hebrew Scriptures	4
3.3	Unnamed Prophets within the Hebrew Scriptures	5
4	When Did the Prophets Live?	6
4.1	A Few Key Dates	6
4.2	A Graphical Timeline	7
5	What’s the Point?	7

1 Our Plan for the Course

Session 1: An Introduction to the Prophets

Session 2: Prophets before the Kingdom

Session 3: Prophets of Israel

Session 4: Prophets of Judah

Session 5: Prophets during Exile and Restoration

2 What is a “Prophet”?

2.1 A Few Key Passages

“The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do so. The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, ‘Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.’”

“The LORD said to me: ‘What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name. But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death.’”

“You may say to yourselves, ‘How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?’ If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed.”

Deuteronomy 18:14-22; see Exodus 20:19; Deuteronomy 5:23–27; 13:1-5.

“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.”

Hebrews 1:1-2

“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

2 Peter 1:21

2.2 Primary Hebrew Term: נָבִיא (nabiy’ /naw·bee/)

- Noun occurs in various forms some 323 times in the Hebrew scriptures
- Related Hebrew noun usually translated, “prophecy” occurs, in various forms, 376 times
- Related Hebrew verb usually translated, “prophesy” occurs, in various forms, 115 times
- In total, these related terms occur, in various forms, 814 times.

Obviously represents a significant theme in the Hebrew scriptures.

2.3 Related Terms

- “Man of God”, Hebrew phrase occurs 210 times within 65 verses.

“Phrase used to describe Moses (Deut. 33:1; Josh. 14:6; 1 Chr. 23:14; 2 Chr. 30:1; Ezra 3:2), the angel of the Lord—thought to be a prophet (Judg. 13:6, 8), Samuel (1 Sam. 9:6–10), Shemaiah (1 Kgs. 12:22; 2 Chr. 11:2), Elijah (1 Kgs. 17:18, 24), and Elisha (e.g., 2 Kgs. 1:9–13; 5:8–15). In later periods the term apparently came to be applied to some, other than prophets, who were thought of as bearing some special relationship to God, such as David (Neh. 12:24, 36; cf. Jer. 35:4).” Myers, A. C. (1987). In *The Eerdmans Bible dictionary* (p. 684). Eerdmans.

“When King Jeroboam heard what the man of God cried out against the altar at Bethel, he stretched out his hand from the altar and said, “Seize him!” But the hand he stretched out toward the man shriveled up, so that he could not pull it back. Also, the altar was split apart and its ashes poured out according to the sign given by the man of God by the word of the LORD.”

1 Kings 13:4-5

- “Seer”, Hebrew term occurs 10 times in 9 verses.

“Formerly in Israel, if someone went to inquire of God, they would say, ‘Come, let us go to the seer,’ because the prophet of today used to be called a seer.” 1 Samuel 9:9

2.4 Working Definition

In the Hebrew scriptures, a prophet is a person through whom God chooses to reveal His Word accurately and authoritatively.

This definition rests on the following assumptions:

- God calls prophets. They do not decide themselves to become prophets.
- God speaks through the prophets, using their human languages, cultures, and behaviors to communicate divine truth. Prophecy is a miraculous transformation of human messages into Divine revelation.
- Genuine prophecy, in its purest sense, must be distinguished from all other human communication, because it accurately and authoritatively declares God’s Word.

While God certainly could call prophets at any time to speak for Him in this manner, the scriptural record strongly suggests that He used them specifically to tell the story recorded in those scriptures. Without the collective witness of these scriptures, it would be difficult to authenticate the accuracy and authority of someone in our day claiming to speak for God as a prophet in this pure sense of the word.

- God often gives prophets the ability to accurately predict future events as a way of authenticating their witness and His Word.

3 Who Are the Prophets?

3.1 Prophets Whose Names Are Attached to Collections within the Hebrew Scriptures

Dates provided below follow the suggestions published in the NIV Study Bible, 2020 edition.

(17 names listed)

Moses (Genesis – Deuteronomy)	c. 1450 BC
Samuel (1 & 2 Samuel)	c. 1000 BC
Isaiah	740-681 BC
Jeremiah (Jeremiah & Lamentations)	626-585 BC
Ezekiel	593-571 BC
Hosea	750-715 BC
Joel	?
Amos	760-750 BC
Obadiah	605-565 BC
Jonah	785-775 BC
Micah	750-686 BC
Nahum	c. 613 BC
Habakkuk	c. 610 BC
Zephaniah	c. 630 BC
Haggai	520 BC
Zechariah	520-480 BC
Malachi	440-430 BC

Note: Daniel is not explicitly described as a “prophet” in the scriptural book ascribed to him, so he is not listed here, but his visions certainly include prophetic elements. Jesus Himself would later refer to Daniel as a “prophet”; see Matthew 24:15.

3.2 Other Named Prophets within the Hebrew Scriptures

(20 names listed)

Abraham	Genesis 20:7
Aaron	Exodus 7:1
Miriam	Exodus 15:20
Deborah	Judges 4:4
Saul	1 Samuel 10:9-12; 19:23-34
Gad	1 Samuel 22:5; 2 Samuel 24:11
Nathan	2 Samuel 7, 12; 1 Kings 1; 1 Chronicles 17:1, etc.
Ahijah	1 Kings 11:29; 14:2, 18
Jehu	1 Kings 16:7, 12
Elijah	1 Kings 17 - 2 Kings 2
Elisha	2 Kings 2 – 9
Micaiah	1 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 18
Jonah, son of Amittai (to be distinguished from the	2 Kings 14:25

prophet associated with the book of <i>Jonah</i>)	
Huldah	2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chronicles 34:22
Shemaiah	2 Chronicles 12:5, 15
Iddo	2 Chronicles 12:15, 13:22
Azariah	2 Chronicles 15:8
Oded	2 Chronicles 15:8; 28:9
Noadiah	Nehemiah 6:14
Hananiah	Jeremiah 28

3.3 Unnamed Prophets within the Hebrew Scriptures

Prophet sent during Midianite oppression	Judges 6:7
Procession of prophets coming out of Gibeah	1 Samuel 10:9
Group of prophets prophesying with Samuel	1 Samuel 19:20
A man of God from Judah	1 Kings 13
An old prophet living in Bethel	1 Kings 13
Prophets of the LORD persecuted by Jezebel (contrasted with prophets of Baal and Asherah)	1 Kings 18
A prophet who visits Ahab, with a “company” of prophets	1 Kings 20
Prophets who advise Jehoshaphat; prophets who accompany Micaiah	1 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 18
A company of prophets at Bethel and Jericho	2 Kings 2
Prophets advising the kings of Israel and Judah	2 Kings 3:13
A company of prophets encountered by Elisha when he helps a widow of one of their deceased members	2 Kings 4:1
A company of prophets at Gilgal	2 Kings 4:38
A company of prophets at Ephraim referenced in Gehazi’s falsehood	2 Kings 5:22
A company of prophets who witness the floating ax head	2 Kings 6:1-7
A young prophet, from a company of prophets, whom Elisha sends to anoint Jehu as king	2 Kings 9:1-10
Prophets of Baal whom Jehu summons	2 Kings 10:18-19
A “man of God” and a prophet both sent to confront Amaziah	2 Chronicles 25
The prophets with Noadiah who try to intimidate Nehemiah	Nehemiah 6:14
The wife of Isaiah called a “prophetess”	Isaiah 8:1

4 When Did the Prophets Live?

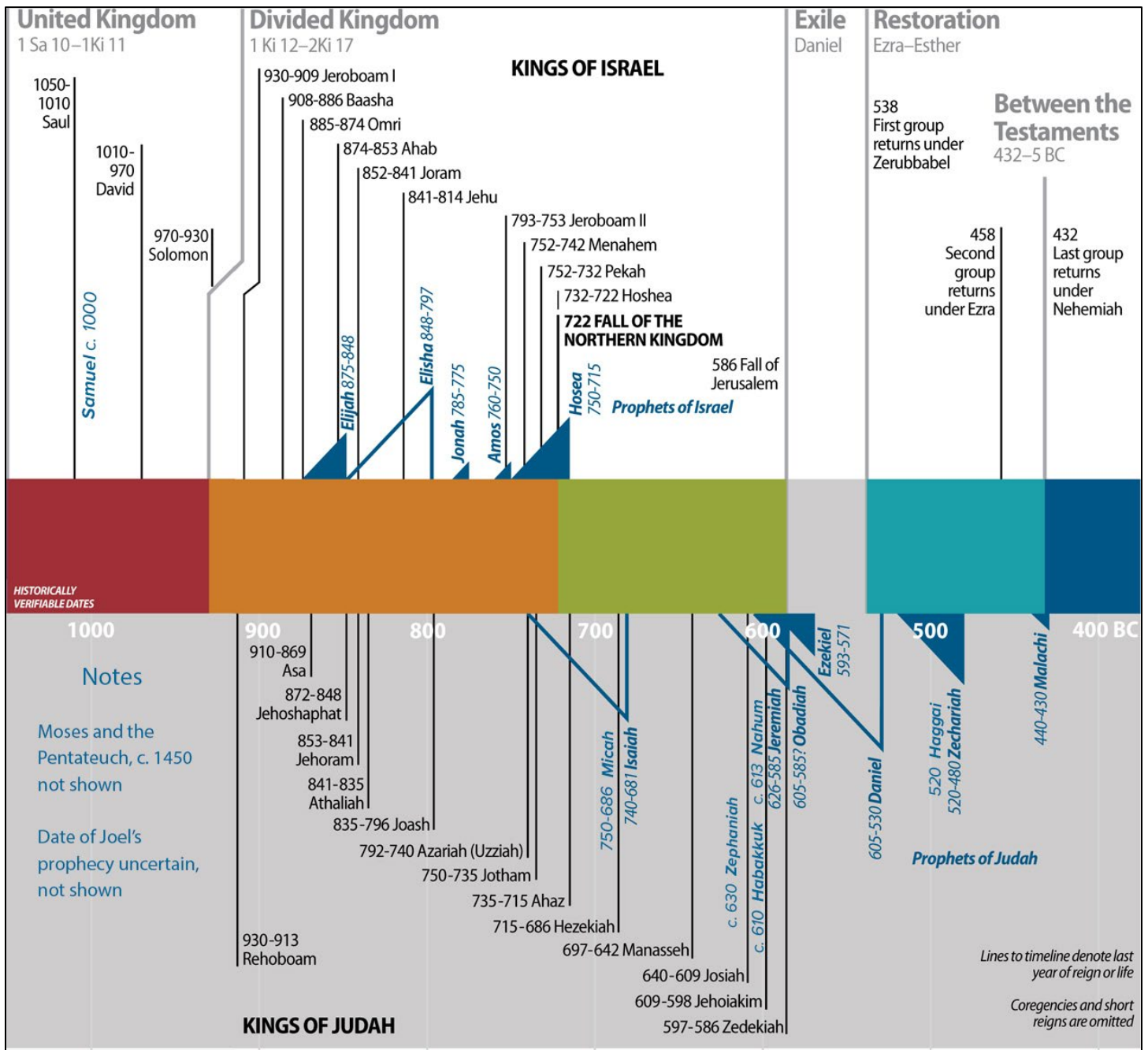
4.1 A Few Key Dates

Note: Dates are approximate; not all interpreters agree.

- King Saul anointed, Kingdom Period begins, 1050 BC
- Solomon's temple completed, 957 BC
- Kingdom divided after the death of Solomon, 930 BC
- Assyria destroys the northern Kingdom of Israel, 722 BC
- Babylon destroys Solomon's temple, 587/586 BC
- Persia allows captives to return to Judea to rebuild the temple, Babylonian Exile ends, 539BC
- Second Temple completed, 516 BC
- Malachi, the last prophet of the Hebrew Scriptures, 440-430 BC

4.2 A Graphical Timeline

Prophets associated with Books in the Hebrew Scriptures: A Graphical Timeline



Adapted from the NIV Study Bible, electronic Logos edition, 2020; Last Revised: 12/22/2022

5 What's the Point?

For over 2000 years, God chose to speak through His prophets, and He sovereignly preserved their writings for our benefit. We would do well to listen to their message.