

An Attempt To Listen To God

Introduction To The Prophets

By

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## Introduction and Clarification

- 1) There is a difference between a prophet and a predictor. The word “prophet” is based on two Greek words, “pro” and “phemi”. Normally the word “pro” means “before” and “phemi” means to speak. Therefore, the word prophet means to speak beforehand. It is in this sense of doing something beforehand we use the word in “proactive” or “procedure”. This is what a “predictor” does. The word “pro” is also used of that which is happening, for instance, the words “proceedings” and “process”. It can also mean “in the place of another”, as in the word “pronoun”. Every predictor is a prophet, but not all prophets were predictors. God told Moses that “Aaron . . . shall be thy prophet” (Ex. 7:1). He stood and spoke to Pharaoh in Moses stead.
- 2) When we think of a prophet, the majority of us think of an individual who foretells the future. When asked to give evidence to support that thought, we would perhaps use Daniel as an illustration for he told Belshazzar what was going to happen to him and his kingdom (Dan. 5:24-31). That would be perfectly right. Then someone says: “Daniel also did the same for Nebuchadnezzar when he revealed to the king the dream he had the previous night, and its interpretation.” (Dan. 2:25-45)
- 3) It may come as a surprise that the prophets are not primarily interested in the future, but more often they were burdened by God concerning the past and present failings of Israel in their relationships to God and man. They spoke plainly condemning sin and exhorting the people to return to God. They sought to show that God was more interested in internal righteousness than external formalities and observances.  
For instance:
  - a) “Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.” (Isa. 1:13)
  - b) “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” (Isa. 55:7)
  - c) “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (Mic. 6:8). This was the message Daniel proclaimed to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:27). He was a “forth teller”, a “teacher”, giving instruction in the ways of God.
- 4) Being the spokesman who, having received God’s message, the prophet had to preach it as the “oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11). He was not to modify it in any way but was to present it as God instructed him. At times it was done orally (Jer. 26:8; Ezek. 3:11), sometimes visually (Isa. 20:2), and at others in written form (Ex. 34:27). Because they were proclaiming God’s message in God’s time and in God’s way, they could say: “Thus saith the Lord” (Ex. 8:1; 2 Kgs. 20:5; Jer. 7:3; Ezek. 16:3). They were “watchmen” (Ezek. 3:17) ready to sound the alarm against apostasy, formality of religion, and cultic worship (Ezek. 8:3-18).
- 5) One of the tests of a true prophet was when His prophetic foretelling words came true. If that which was predicted did not come true, it was a clear indication that the individual was not a prophet from God (Deut. 18:20-22; 1 Sam. 3:19).

## The Different Types of Prophets

In the history of Israel there were several sorts of prophets.  
There were those which:

- 1) Came from God and there were two groups of them.
  - a) Those of whom we have no writings such as:
    - i) Nathan (2 Sam. 7:2); Ahijah (1 Kgs. 11:29); Iddo (2 Chron. 9:29); Jehu (1 Kgs. 16:7); Elijah (1 Kgs. 18:22); Jehu (1 Kgs. 16:12); Oded (2 Chron. 15:8); Hanani (2 Chron. 16:7).
- 2) Those who spoke and we are not given exactly what they wrote, such as “The book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer (1 Chron. 29:29). Shemaiah (2 Chron. 12:15).

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- 3) Those who wrote and verbally prophesied:
  - a) Enoch (Jude 1:14); Moses was a prophet (Deut. 34:10) and he also wrote the book of the law (2 Chron. 34:14; Ezra 6:18; Mk. 12:26); Isaiah (Isa. 1:1); Jeremiah (Jer.1:1), Lamentations (The Septuagint prefaces this book with these words: “And it happened, after Israel was taken captive and Ierousalem (Jerusalem) was laid waste, Ieremias (Jeremiah) sat weeping and gave this lament over Ierousalem (Jerusalem) and said: How the city sat alone, all that were her friends dealt treacherously with her; they became enemies to her. Judaea was deported from her humiliation and from greatness of her slavery; she sat among nations; she has found no rest; all those pursuing her have overtaken her among her oppressors. Roads to Sion mourn because there is none that comes to a feast; all her gates are obliterated; her priests groan” (Lam. 1:1-2); Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:3); Daniel (Dan. 12:4-9); Hosea (Hos. 1:1); Joel (Joel 1:1); Amos (Amos 1:1); Obadiah (Obad. 1:1); Jonah (Jon. 1:1); Micah (Mic. 1:1); Nahum (Nah. 1:1); Habakkuk (Hab. 1:1); Zephaniah (Zeph. 1:1); Haggai (Hag. 1:1); Zechariah (Zech. 1:1); Malachi (Mal.1:1).
- 4) Those who were declared to be prophets and did prophecy but were never prophets as an official office.
  - a) Abraham was the first man to be called a prophet (Gen. 20:7). He did give a prophetic statement when he said: “God will provide Himself a lamb” (Gen. 22:8). (Observe that Enoch prophesied before Abraham, but was not mentioned as a prophet until Jude 1:14.) Others were Joseph (Gen. 40:5-19); and Caiaphas (Jn. 18:14).
- 5) There was a difference between a divinely chosen prophet and a self determined one. The self declared ones “speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord” (Jer. 23:16). They went without being sent by God, “I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied” (Jer. 23:21). The prophet who was divinely sent spoke the words of God (Deut. 18:18).
- 6) There were also lady prophetess: Miriam (Ex. 15:20); Deborah (Jud. 4:4); Noadiah (Neh. 6:14); Isaiah’s wife (Isa. 8:3); Anna (Lk. 2:36); and the daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9).
- 7) Despite being called prophets, there were those individuals who were very far from God, such as the prophets of Samaria (Jer. 23:13); the prophets of Jerusalem (Jer. 23:14); the prophets of Israel (Ezek. 13:16); (Deut. 13:1-5).
  - a) Those which came from Satan such as the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs. 18:19); Bar-jesus (Acts 13:6); The false prophet (Rev. 16:13).
- 8) There were prophets by their experiences:
  - a) Isaac prophetically foreshadowed the sacrifice of the Lord. (Isa. 53:1-12)
  - b) Joseph, the beloved son, also called Zaphnath-paaneah (Gen. 41:45) who was hated by his brethren and sold, but ultimately lifted to the highest place.

### The Descriptive Terms For The Prophets

- 1) The first observation is that prophets were called “seers” and “Prophets”, with each term having its own significance:
  - a) Seer:
    - i) “Ra’ah” - “let us go to the “seer”, for he that is now called a Prophet” (1 Sam. 9:9). It is one who has been given insight into that which is not seen naturally.
    - ii) “Chozeh” - “ The word of the Lord came unto the prophet Gad, David’s seer” (2 Sam. 24:11).
  - b) Prophet:
    - a) Heb. (nabiy) a prophet. This title has several thoughts:
      - i) The first reference is when God spoke to Pharaoh, and speaking of Abram, God called him a prophet (Gen. 20:7) and the Lord said: “He shall pray for thee”. Such a one was an intercessor.

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- ii) The central thought of this title is an authorized spokesman for God. Nathan was a prophet but was not an authorized spokesman for God when he told David to build the House of the Lord. This is made clear, for a little while later Nathan had to come back to David, and he began by saying: "Thus saith the Lord". Now He was an authorized spokesman for God. (2 Sam. 12:7)

### The Distinctions In The Prophets

We speak of the major and minor prophets. However, the scriptures use no such terminology. Furthermore, to accommodate such arbitrary divisions: Some will say the major are called that because they are bigger! However, this is not necessarily the case for Daniel is a major prophet and has 12 chapters, whereas Zechariah is a minor prophet and has 14 chapters! Another will say it is similar to music, there are major keys and minor keys. The major being light and delightful, and the minor are more melancholy. Again, neither is this correct for Hosea ends with the exhortation: "What have I to do anymore with idols? I have heard Him, and observed Him" (Hos. 14:8); Amos ends with the promise of God: "I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God" (Amos 9:15); even to the Gentiles Jonah's book ends with God's manifestation of mercy: "Should not I spare Nineveh" (Jon. 4:11). The truth is, I have never found a reliable reason for the division being so labeled.

### At What Stages in History Did God Send Prophets?

- 1) From Adam to Moses. The only two I am aware of are Enoch (Jude 1:14) and Abraham (Gen. 20:7).
- 2) From Moses to the Wilderness there were at least two, Moses and Miriam (Deut. 34:10; Ex. 15:20).
- 3) In the Land during the Judges there were several, the most notable being Deborah (Jud. 4:4).
- 4) In the land during the Kings there was:
  - a) Samuel (1 Sam. 3:20)
  - b) Nathan (2 Sam. 7:2)
  - c) Ahijah the Shilonite (1 Kgs. 11:29)
  - d) Elijah (1 Kgs. 18:36)
  - e) Micaiah (1 Kgs. 22:8)
  - f) Elisha (2 Kgs. 6:12)
  - g) Jeremiah (Dan. 9:2)
  - h) Isaiah (2 Kgs. 19:2)
  - i) Habakkuk (Hab. 1:1)
  - j) The following are not individually called prophets but it was their work, and they were recognized as such.
    - i) Amos
    - ii) Hosea
    - iii) Micah
    - iv) Nahum
    - v) Zephaniah
- 5) During the captivity of Babylon there was:
  - a) Daniel (Matt. 24:15)
  - b) Joel (Acts 2:16)
  - c) Ezekiel is not called such
- 6) After the Babylonian captivity and before the Lord came there was:
  - a) Haggai (Ezra 5:1)
  - b) Zechariah (Zech. 1:1)
  - c) Malachi is not called such.

- 7) After the Lord was born there was:
- John Baptist (Lk. 7:28)
  - Paul (Acts 20:29-30; 1 Cor. 15:51-55)
  - Peter (2 Pet. 3:7-10)
  - John the apostle (Rev. chs. 1-22)

### The Prophets of The Divided Kingdoms

#### 1) Judah

These were divided into two groups:

- Oral Prophets
  - Shemaiah (1 Kgs 12:22-24; 2 Chron. 11:1;
  - Iddo (2 Chron. 9:29; 12:15; 13:22);
  - Oded (2 Chron. 15:1, 8); (There were two Oded's)
  - Azariah (2 Chron. 15:1-8);
  - Hanani (2 Chron. 16:7-10);
  - Eliezer (2 Chron. 20:35-37);
  - Zechariah (2 Chron. 26:3-5).
- Literary Prophets, those who not only spoke but wrote of the political and spiritual situation of Israel and at times the nations such as:
  - Micah ( Mic. 1:1-7:20);
  - Habakkuk ( Hab. 1: 1-2:20);
  - Haggai (Hag. 1-2:23)

#### 2) Israel

Israel was also divided into groups:

- Oral Prophets
  - Ahijah (1 Kgs. 11:29-39; 12:15; 14:2-18; 15:29; 2 Chron. 9:29; 10:15);
  - Elijah (1 Kgs. chs. 17-19; 21:17-29; 9:36, 10:10, 17; 2 Chron. 21:12-15)
  - Micaiah (1 Kgs. 22:8-28; 2 Chron. 18:6-27)
  - Elisha (1 Kgs. 19:15-21; 2 Kgs. 2-9:1; 13:15-21)
  - Jonah (2 Kgs. 14:23-27)
  - Oded (2 Chron. 28:9)
- Literary Prophets
  - Amos
  - Hosea

#### 3) To Both Kingdoms

- Jehu (1 Kgs 16:1-4, 7; 2 Chron. 19:1-3, 20:34)

### The Prophets And The Babylonian Exile

After their deliverance from Egypt, Israel had two major enemies, the Assyrians and the Babylonians. When Biblical scholars speak of the "exile" it is normally the Babylonian and it's seventy years duration.

- Those who prophesied before the exile were:
  - Obadiah who wrote to and about Edom.
  - Amos, Hosea, and Joel who wrote to the northern kingdom.
  - Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah and Jeremiah who wrote to warn Judah.
- Those who prophesied pre and during the exile were Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.
- Those who wrote after the return from Babylon were Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

## Literary Structure

Most of the prophecies are accumulations of messages given over several years, but they all have a broad series of thoughts. There was:

- 1) The background of the prophet or nation to whom it was addressed.
- 2) The accusation of the sin, its description, and the judgment which was approaching.
- 3) An exhortation for repentance.
- 4) A promise of future deliverance.
- 5) They use introductory or concluding formula: "This is what the Lord says..."

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**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.  
John 16:13**

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