

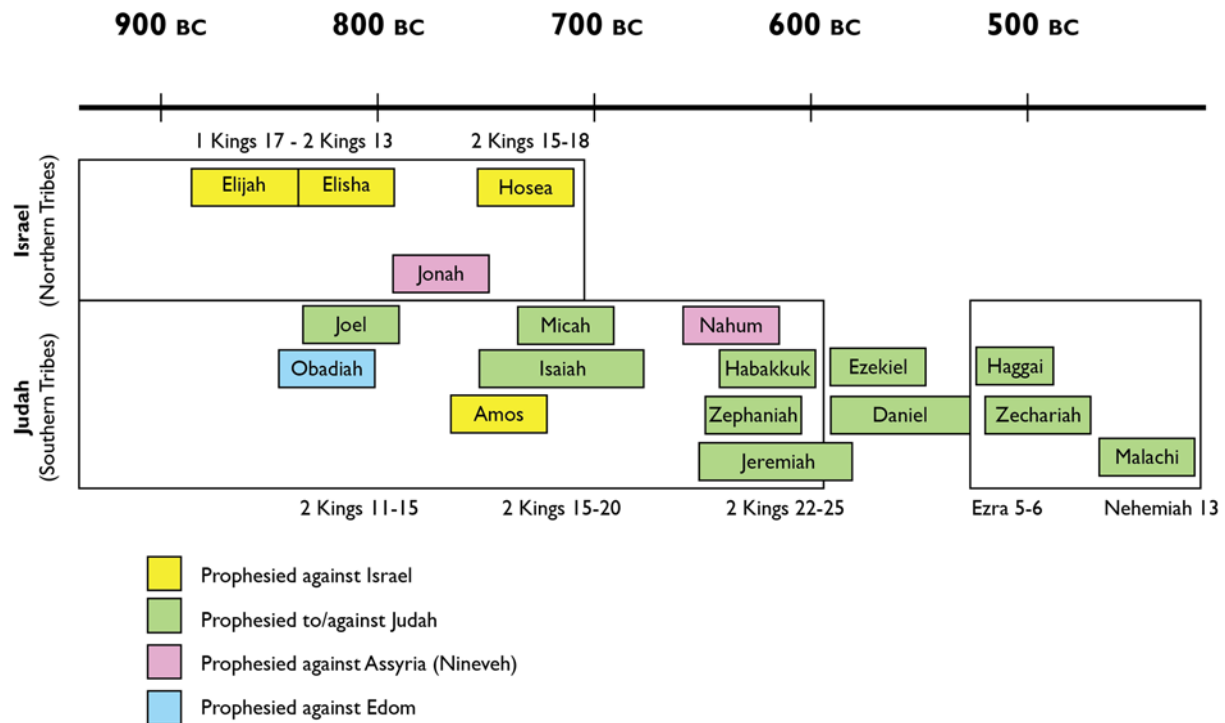
# How to Understand and Apply the Bible

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## Interpreting the Prophets

**Major Prophets:** Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel.

**Minor Prophets:** Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.



1. Outside of narrative descriptions, prophets delivered oracles of God.

Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant." (Jer 1:9-10)

2. The prophets were **covenant enforcers** who mediated God's message to Israel.

**Blessings:** Lev 26:3-13; Deut 4:32-40; Deut 28:1-14

**Curses (punishments):** Lev 26:14-39; Deut 4:15-28; Deut 28:15-32:42

3. Because oracles are tied to a specific historical context, tools are needed to understand the prophets!
4. When the prophet is sharing God's message of hope or judgment, sometimes the near future and far future are blended in the same context.

Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.'" (Ezek 37:11-14)

"My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your ancestors lived. They and their children and their children's children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.'" (Ezek 37:24-28)

5. Locate and isolate oracles as literary units.

## Types of Oracles

### 1. Messenger speech

e.g., Amos 7:14–17; Ezekiel 35:1–15; Isa 38:4-8; Jer 35:17-19; Mal 1:2-5

- Prophetic word formula ("The word of the Lord came to \_\_\_\_\_")
- Commissioning formula ("Go and say.../Go and tell...")
- Messenger formula ("This is what the Lord says...")
- Message

<sup>4</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: <sup>5</sup>“Go and tell Hezekiah, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life. <sup>6</sup>And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city.” (Isa 38:4-6)

## 2. Vision

e.g., Amos 7:1–9; 8:1ff; 9:1ff; Dan 7:1-14; Ezekiel 1:1 – 3:15; 8:1 – 11:25; 37:1-14; Zech 1:7-9

- Announcement of vision (“This is what the Lord showed me...” / “I saw...”)
- Transition
- Vision sequence

This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: He was preparing swarms of locusts after the king’s share had been harvested and just as the late crops were coming up. <sup>2</sup>When they had stripped the land clean, I cried out, “Sovereign LORD, forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!”

<sup>3</sup>So the LORD relented. “This will not happen,” the LORD said.

<sup>4</sup>This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: The Sovereign LORD was calling for judgment by fire; it dried up the great deep and devoured the land. <sup>5</sup>Then I cried out, “Sovereign LORD, I beg you, stop! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!”

<sup>6</sup>So the LORD relented. “This will not happen either,” the Sovereign LORD said. (Amos 7:1-6)

## 3. Judgment oracle

e.g., Amos 2:6–16; Ezekiel 7:1–27; Micah 3:5-12; 3:9-12; 6:1-8; 6:9-16

- Accusation (who and why)
- Link (logical connective)
- Announcement of judgment

<sup>5</sup>This is what the LORD says:

“As for the prophets  
who lead my people astray,  
they proclaim ‘peace’  
if they have something to eat,  
but prepare to wage war against anyone  
who refuses to feed them.

<sup>6</sup>Therefore night will come over you, without visions,  
and darkness, without divination.

The sun will set for the prophets,  
and the day will go dark for them.” (Micah 3:5-6)

#### **4. Covenant lawsuit**

e.g., Hosea 4:1–19; Amos 3:1–15; Isa 3:13-26; Jeremiah 2:1-37; Ezekiel 20:1–44; 22:1-31; Mic 6:1-8

- Summons
- Charge
- Evidence
- Verdict

The Lord takes his place in court;  
he rises to judge the people.  
The Lord enters into judgment  
against the elders and leaders of his people:  
“It is you who have ruined my vineyard;  
the plunder from the poor is in your houses.  
What do you mean by crushing my people  
and grinding the faces of the poor?”  
declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty. ...  
Your men will fall by the sword,  
your warriors in battle.  
The gates of Zion will lament and mourn;  
destitute, she will sit on the ground.” (Isa 3:13-15, 25-26)

#### **5. Woe oracle**

e.g., Amos 5:18–27; 6:1–7; Isa 5:9-30; Ezekiel 34:1–31; Micah 2:1-5; Hab 2:6-8, 9-11

- Announcement of distress
- Reason for distress
- Prediction of disaster

“Woe to him who builds his house by unjust gain,  
setting his nest on high  
to escape the clutches of ruin!  
You have plotted the ruin of many peoples,  
shaming your own house and forfeiting your life.  
The stones of the wall will cry out,  
and the beams of the woodwork will echo it.” (Hab 2:9-11)

## 6. Salvation oracle

e.g., Amos 9:11–15; Ezekiel 36:16–38; Isa 45:1-7; Jer 31:1-9; Micah 2:12-13; 4:1-5; 4:6-8; 5:7-9

- Reference to the future
- Proclamation of radical change
- Blessing

“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)

## 7. Lament

e.g., Amos 5:1–17; Ezekiel 19:1–14; Micah 1:8-16; 7:1-7; Lamentations

Hear this word, Israel, this lament I take up concerning you:

“Fallen is Virgin Israel,  
never to rise again,  
deserted in her own land,  
with no one to lift her up.”

This is what the Sovereign Lord says to Israel:

“Your city that marches out a thousand strong  
will have only a hundred left;  
your town that marches out a hundred strong  
will have only ten left.” (Amos 5:1-3)

## 8. Call Narrative

e.g., Isa 6:1-13; Jer 1:1-19

<sup>8</sup>Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”

And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

<sup>9</sup>He said, “Go and tell this people:

“Be ever hearing, but never understanding;  
be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’

<sup>10</sup> Make the heart of this people calloused;  
make their ears dull  
and close their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,  
hear with their ears,  
understand with their hearts,  
and turn and be healed.” (Isa 6:8-10)

## 9. Symbolic act/Enactment oracle

e.g., Ezek 4:1-5:17; 24:1-5; Jer 24:1-10; Isa 20:1-6; Zech 11:4-17

“Now, son of man, take a block of clay, put it in front of you and draw the city of Jerusalem on it. Then lay siege to it: Erect siege works against it, build a ramp up to it, set up camps against it and put battering rams around it. Then take an iron pan, place it as an iron wall between you and the city and turn your face toward it. It will be under siege, and you shall besiege it. This will be a sign to the people of Israel.

“Then lie on your left side and put the sin of the people of Israel upon yourself. You are to bear their sin for the number of days you lie on your side. I have assigned you the same number of days as the years of their sin. So for 390 days you will bear the sin of the people of Israel.” (Ezek 4:1-5)

## 10. Prophetic disputation

e.g., Amos 3:3-8; Micah 2:6-11; 3:5-8; Malachi 1:2-5; 1:6-2:9

Do two walk together  
unless they have agreed to do so?

<sup>4</sup> Does a lion roar in the thicket  
when it has no prey?

Does it growl in its den  
when it has caught nothing?

<sup>5</sup> Does a bird swoop down to a trap on the ground  
when no bait is there?

Does a trap spring up from the ground  
if it has not caught anything?

<sup>6</sup> When a trumpet sounds in a city,  
do not the people tremble?

When disaster comes to a city,  
has not the LORD caused it?

<sup>7</sup> Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing  
without revealing his plan  
to his servants the prophets. (Amos 3:3-7)

## 11. Oracles against foreign nations

e.g., Amos 1:11-12; Ezek 26:1-21

In the eleventh month of the twelfth year, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, because Tyre has said of Jerusalem, ‘Aha! The gate to the nations is broken, and its doors have swung open to me; now that she lies in ruins I will prosper,’ <sup>3</sup>therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against you, Tyre, and I will bring many nations against you, like the sea casting up its waves.” (Ezek 26:1-3)

Sample passage to look at:

Hosea 4:1-5:7—

Hear the word of the LORD, you Israelites,  
because the LORD has a charge to bring  
against you who live in the land:  
“There is no faithfulness, no love,  
no acknowledgment of God in the land.  
<sup>2</sup>There is only cursing, lying and murder,  
stealing and adultery;  
they break all bounds,  
and bloodshed follows bloodshed.  
<sup>3</sup>Because of this the land dries up,  
and all who live in it waste away;  
the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky  
and the fish in the sea are swept away. (Hos 4:1-3)

...

<sup>6</sup>When they go with their flocks and herds  
to seek the LORD,  
they will not find him;  
he has withdrawn himself from them.  
<sup>7</sup>They are unfaithful to the LORD;  
they give birth to illegitimate children.  
When they celebrate their New Moon feasts,  
he will devour their fields. (Hos 5:6-7)

# Prophets:

Interpretation to application, step by step

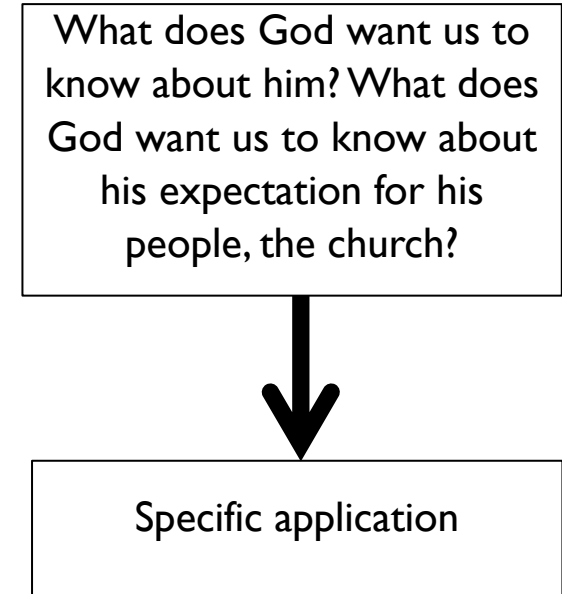
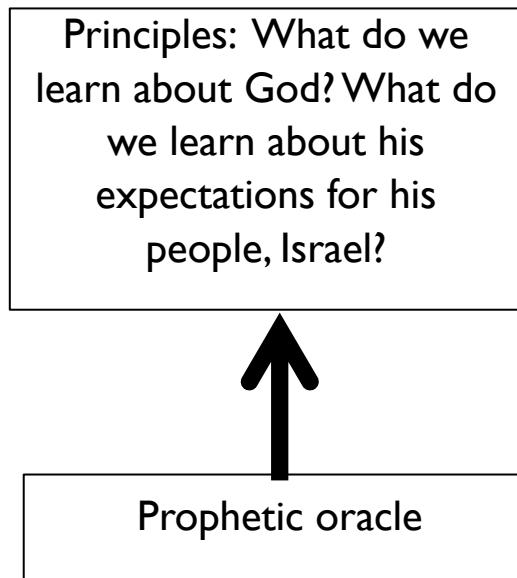
## Old Covenant

View the action through the lens of the law

- Israel entered into a covenant with God with punishment for unfaithfulness: Lev 26:14-39; Deut 4:15-28; Deut 28:15-32:42
- and blessing for faithfulness: Lev 26:3-13; Deut 4:32-40; Deut 28:1-14

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Israel (the northern kingdom) violated fundamental commandments and is shown to be faithless, offering meaningless sacrifices.

Hosea 4:1-5:7



Our faith is revealed by the kind of lives we live in holiness before our God, not by the superficiality of religion.

I need to stop compromising/lying/living in a worldly manner if I expect God's blessings.