



Understanding and Applying the Bible

Pastor Michael Cranford



Schedule

- Jan 22nd Understanding God's Law
- Jan 29th Understanding Historical Narrative
- Feb 5th Understanding the Psalms
- Feb 12th Understanding Wisdom Books
- Feb 19th Understanding the Prophets**
- Feb 26th Understanding the Gospels
- Mar 5th Understanding Parables
- Mar 12th Understanding Acts
- Mar 19th Understanding the Epistles
- Mar 26th Understanding Revelation (Apocalyptic)



Prophets

An illustration with a warm orange and yellow color palette. On the left, a large, dark brown shark is shown from the side, its mouth wide open, revealing rows of sharp, yellow teeth. A stream of yellow liquid is dripping from the shark's mouth. In the foreground, a prophet with a long white beard, wearing a dark robe and a white head covering, is running away from the shark towards the right. The prophet is carrying a large, yellow book under his arm. The background consists of stylized, wavy orange and yellow shapes representing water or a desert landscape.

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

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

900 BC

800 BC

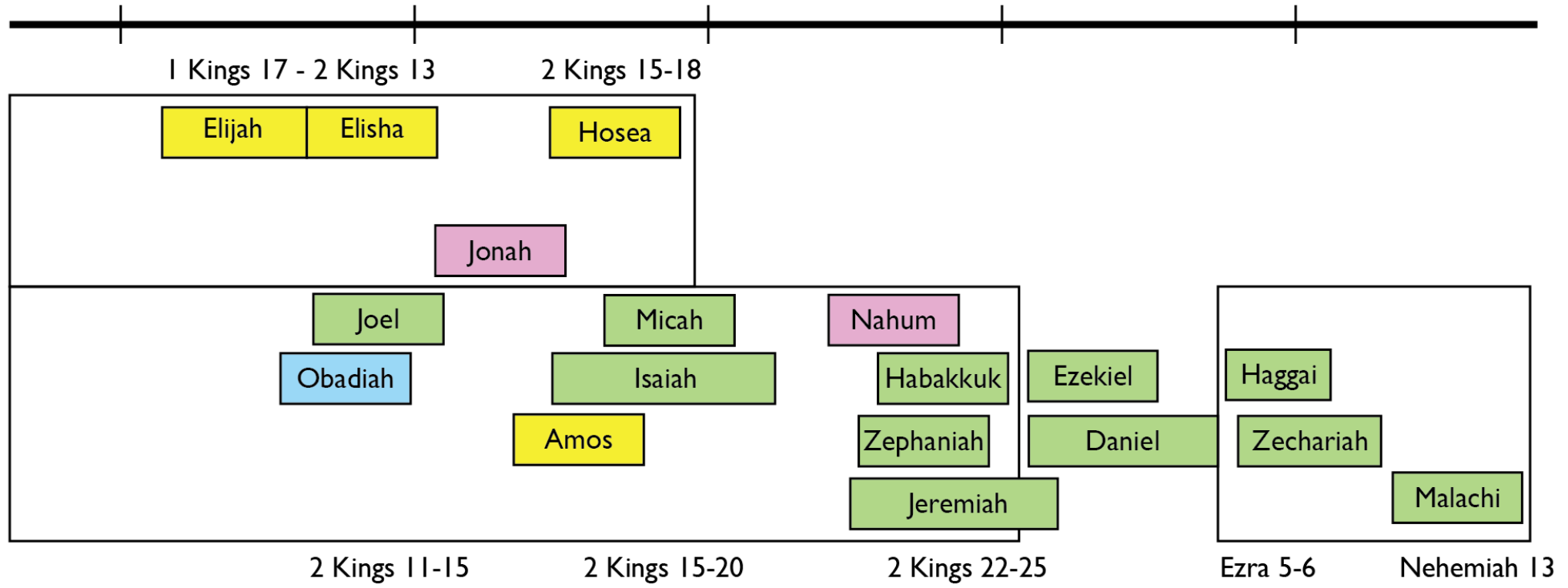
700 BC

600 BC

500 BC

Israel
(Northern Tribes)

Judah
(Southern Tribes)



- Prophesied against Israel
- Prophesied to/against Judah
- Prophesied against Assyria (Nineveh)
- Prophesied against Edom

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

After you have had children and grandchildren and have lived in the land a long time—if you then become corrupt and make any kind of idol, doing evil in the eyes of the LORD your God and arousing his anger, I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you this day that you will quickly perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess. You will not live there long but will certainly be destroyed. The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and only a few of you will survive among the nations to which the LORD will drive you. There you will worship man-made gods of wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or eat or smell. But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deut 4:25-29)

3. Because oracles are tied to a specific historical context, tools are needed to understand the prophets!

- Divided kingdom under Rehoboam (the son of Solomon) **931 BC**
- The sin and destruction of Israel (northern kingdom) by Assyria **721 BC**
- The sin and destruction of Judah (southern kingdom) by Babylon **586 BC**
- The restoration and renewal of Judah **538 BC**



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)

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.

“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)

Prophets

An illustration with a warm, orange-to-yellow color palette. On the left, a large, dark brown shark is shown from the side, with its mouth wide open, revealing rows of sharp, light-colored teeth. The shark's eye is visible. In the lower right, a prophet wearing a dark robe and a white turban stands in the water, arms outstretched in a gesture of proclamation or warning. The background consists of stylized, layered waves in various shades of orange and yellow.

1. Outside of narrative descriptions, prophets delivered oracles of God.
2. The prophets were covenant enforcers who mediated God's message to Israel.
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.
5. **Locate and isolate oracles as literary units.**

1. Messenger speech

- 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

Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: “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. 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

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



2. Vision

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. When they had stripped the land clean, I cried out, "Sovereign LORD, forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!"

So the LORD relented. "This will not happen," the LORD said.

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. Then I cried out, "Sovereign LORD, I beg you, stop! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!"

So the LORD relented. "This will not happen either," the Sovereign LORD said.

(Amos 7:1-6)

3. Judgment oracle

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

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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

- Summons
- Charge
- Evidence
- Verdict



4. Covenant lawsuit

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

- 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

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



6. Salvation oracle

“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.

“The days are coming,” declares the Lord,

“when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman
and the planter by the one treading grapes.

New wine will drip from the mountains

and flow from all the hills,

and I will bring my people Israel back from exile.

“They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them.

They will plant vineyards and drink their wine;

they will make gardens and eat their fruit.

I will plant Israel in their own land,

never again to be uprooted

from the land I have given them,”

says the Lord your God. (Amos 9:11-15)



7. Lament

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

⁸ 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!”

⁹ He said, “Go and tell this people:

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

¹⁰ 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

“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

³ Do two walk together
unless they have agreed to do so?

⁴ Does a lion roar in the thicket
when it has no prey?

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

⁵ 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?

⁶ When a trumpet sounds in a city,
do not the people tremble?

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

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

11. Oracles against foreign nations

In the eleventh month of the twelfth year, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me:² “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,’³ 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)



Prophets: Interpretation to application, step by step

Old Covenant

View the action through the lens of the law

Principles: What do we learn about God? What do we learn about his expectations for his people, Israel?

Prophetic oracle

- 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

New Covenant

God's new covenant is by the Spirit (not the law) and is free from condemnation, but God's holy nature and expectation of holiness for his people remain the same.

What does God want us to know about him? What does God want us to know about his expectation for his people, the church?

Specific application

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.

² There is only cursing, lying and murder,
stealing and adultery;
they break all bounds,
and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

³ 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)

Messenger speech

Covenant lawsuit oracle

- Charge
- Evidence
“But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant...” (Lev 26:14-15)
- Verdict
“Your strength will be spent in vain, because your soil will not yield its crops, nor will the trees of your land yield their fruit.” (Lev 26:20)

Hosea 4:1-5:7

⁶ When they go with their flocks and herds
to seek the LORD,
they will not find him;
he has withdrawn himself from them.

⁷ 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

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

Hosea 4:1-5:7

- 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

New Covenant

God's new covenant is by the Spirit (not the law) and is free from condemnation, but God's holy nature and expectation of holiness for his people remain the same.

Principle: 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.



The greatest of the prophets

“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.” (Deut 18:15)

After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” (John 6:14)

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. (Heb 1:1-2)