

Prophets Overview

Prophets Before the Fall and Exile

Amos (c. 750 BCE)

Amos was from the south yet was called by God to speak to the Northern Kingdom. He is preaching during a time of great prosperity, yet also a time when God's law was ignored, especially when it came to the treatment of the poor and oppressed.

Amos was a shepherd and a fig farmer. He is also the first prophet to record his message. He preaches at the Northern sanctuary of Bethel and declares that God will judge the people because of their sins.

Amos calls upon the people to engage in social justice.

1:1 *The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of King Uzziah of Judah and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel, two years^[a] before the earthquake.*

2:6 *Thus says the LORD: For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;*

^{43:10}*because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—*

5:21-24 *I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look on.²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps.²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

7:14 *Then Amos answered Amaziah, "I am^[b] no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am^[c] a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees,¹⁵ and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'*

8:4-6 *Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land,⁵ saying, "When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the Sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances,⁶ buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat."*

Hosea (c. 730-721 BCE)

Hosea is a northerner who preaches to his people in the midst of the Assyrian Chaos (multiple Israelite kings were assassinated and replaced all under the pressure of Assyria's presence).

The focus of his teaching is that God will always redeem God's people even when they prostitute themselves to other Gods. To illustrate this, Hosea takes a prostitute for a wife and when she runs off, he goes and reclaims her.

1:2-9 When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord." **3** So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. **4** And the Lord said to him, "Name him Jezreel;^[a] for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. **5** On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." **6** She conceived again and bore a daughter. Then the Lord said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah,^[b] for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them. **7** But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God; I will not save them by bow, or by sword, or by war, or by horses, or by horsemen." **8** When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. **9** Then the Lord said, "Name him Lo-ammi,^[c] for you are not my people and I am not your God."^[d]

8:4 They made kings, but not through me; they set up princes, but without my knowledge. With their silver and gold, they made idols for their own destruction.

11:1 When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

Isaiah 1-39 (c. 740-686 BCE)

Isaiah is considered by many to be the greatest of the prophets. In this paper we will also mention Second (Chapters 40-55) and Third Isaiah (Chapters 56-66) because I believe these are sections of the book that were written at a later date.

Isaiah prophesied in Judah and was a witness to the initial Assyrian invasion (740) and its domination of both Israel and Judah. Judah's king Ahaz offered tribute to Assyria and so survived. When Hezekiah came to power as King over Judah, he rebelled twice. The second time, ended in a miraculous salvation of Judah.

Isaiah's focus was on righteous living. Only by being both religiously and socially pure could the people of God escape the fate of God's wrath. Note however that in Isaiah's call in chapter 6 it is made clear that Judah will not listen and God will destroy them. Even so God will bring a messiah who will save the nation.

1:18 Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

2:2-4 In days to come the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.³ Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths. "For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem."⁴ He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple.

7:14-17 ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman^[e] is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.^[f] ¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

8:24 ²⁴ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD of hosts: O my people, who live in Zion, do not be afraid of the Assyrians when they beat you with a rod and lift up their staff against you as the Egyptians did.

9:6 For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

11:1 A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

37:5 When the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah, 6 Isaiah said to them, "Say to your master, 'Thus says the Lord: Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me. 7 I myself will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor, and return to his own land; I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.'"

Micah (c. 737-696 BCE)

Micah was from the south (Judah) and he directed most of his remarks toward Jerusalem. He prophesied not only its destruction but that of Samaria (or Israel). Like Isaiah he predicted the downfall of the nation because of its corruption and ill-treatment of the poor and vulnerable. He also predicted that God would establish a new Kingdom which would include Gentiles who would come to worship God.

1:6 Therefore I will make Samaria a heap in the open country, a place for planting vineyards. I will pour down her stones into the valley, and uncover her foundations.

4:1-4 In days to come the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it,² and many nations shall come and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.³ He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore;⁴ but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

5:2 But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.

6:8 He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Prophets After the Fall and Before the Exile

Zephaniah (c. 641-610 BCE)

Zephaniah worked during the early ministry of Jeremiah. Zephaniah was a supporter of King Josiah who was attempting to bring back true worship of YHWH. Prior to Josiah, the kings had been dominated by Assyria and its worship. They had set up idols in the temple and failed to stand with YHWH and the law. Even so, Zephaniah talks about the “Day of the Lord” which will be God’s judgement not only on Judah, but also on the nations around them, the nations that oppressed them and especially on Assyria. The prophet is not all gloom and doom offering a vision of a restored people.

1:14 The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast ;the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter, the warrior cries aloud there.

Nahum (c. 615 BCE)

Nahum relishes the destruction of Assyria. The prophet views it as God’s judgment upon those who are cruel to God’s people.

1:1 An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh.

3:5 I am against you, says the Lord of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will let nations look on your nakedness and kingdoms on your shame.

Habakkuk (c. 608-598 CE)

The prophet is dealing with difficult times in which the righteous (Judah) is suffering at the hands of evil (Babylon). The answer is that God is still in charge, will rescuer God’s people and that people are to live by faith.

2:1-4 I will stand at my watch-post, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he^{1a} will answer concerning my complaint.² Then the LORD answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it.³ For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.

3:2 O LORD, I have heard of your renown, and I stand in awe, O LORD, of your work .In our own time revive it; in our own time make it known; in wrath may you remember mercy.

Prophets During the Fall and into Exile

Jeremiah (c. 626 – 587 BCE)

Jeremiah preaches to Jerusalem and predicts its destruction because of its unfaithfulness. This proclamation pits him against other prophets and the leadership of the city. He is seen as a traitor and

his life is often at risk. He condemned greedy priests, false prophets and idolatry. Even though he predicts that the land will fall to Babylon and that the city should not resist, he also purchases property outside of the city as a reminder that God will restore God's people. His life ends in Egypt where he is taken as a captive by those fleeing the Babylonians.

1:1-10 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,⁵ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."⁶ Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."⁷ But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you."⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD."⁹ Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth."¹⁰ See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

4:10 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,⁵ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."⁶ Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."⁷ But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you."⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD."⁹ Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth."¹⁰ See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

8:22 Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?

12:1 You will be in the right, O Lord, when I lay charges against you; but let me put my case to you. Why does the way of the guilty prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?

15:10 Woe is me, my mother, that you ever bore me, a man of strife and contention to the whole land! I have not lent, nor have I borrowed, yet all of them curse me. **11** The Lord said: Surely I have intervened in your life[a] for good, surely I have imposed enemies on you in a time of trouble and in a time of distress. **12** Can iron and bronze break iron from the north?

18 The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: **2** "Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." **3** So I went down to the potter's house, and there he

was working at his wheel. 4 The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

19 Thus said the Lord: Go and buy a potter's earthenware jug. Take with you[a] some of the elders of the people and some of the senior priests, 2 and go out to the valley of the son of Hinnom at the entry of the Potsherd Gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you. 3 You shall say: Hear the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to bring such disaster upon this place that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle.

20:7-9, 14 O Lord, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me.8 For whenever I speak, I must cry out, I must shout, "Violence and destruction!" For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long.9 If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot. Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed!

31:15-17 Thus says the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.16 Thus says the Lord: Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for there is a reward for your work, says the Lord: they shall come back from the land of the enemy;17 there is hope for your future, says the Lord: your children shall come back to their own country.

31:31-34 31 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband,] says the Lord. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Ezekiel (c.587-570)

Ezekiel is the prophet of the exile. He preaches from Babylon. His message is that God has only temporarily left Jerusalem (because of its sins) but will return and defeat the enemies of God (this can be seen in the image of the "Glory of the Lord" which leaves the Temple, then the city, then moves to Babylon and then returns and inhabits a restored Temple). Jeremiah tells the people in exile that they were to settle down in Babylon and seek the welfare of the city where God has placed you.

1:1-3 In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. 2 On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), 3 the word of the Lord came to the priest Ezekiel son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was on him there.

2:1-3 He said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. 2 And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. 3 He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation[b] of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day.

3:1-13 He said to me, O mortal, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. 2 So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. 3 He said to me, Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey.

4:1-3 And you, O mortal, take a brick and set it before you. On it portray a city, Jerusalem; 2 and put siege-works against it, and build a siege wall against it, and cast up a ramp against it; set camps also against it, and plant battering rams against it all around. 3 Then take an iron plate and place it as an iron wall between you and the city; set your face toward it, and let it be in a state of siege, and press the siege against it. This is a sign for the house of Israel.

12:3-6 for they are a rebellious house. Therefore, mortal, prepare for yourself an exile's baggage, and go into exile by day in their sight; you shall go like an exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house. 4 You shall bring out your baggage by day in their sight, as baggage for exile; and you shall go out yourself at evening in their sight, as those do who go into exile. 5 Dig through the wall in their sight, and carry the baggage through it. 6 In their sight you shall lift the baggage on your shoulder, and carry it out in the dark; you shall cover your face, so that you may not see the land; for I have made you a sign for the house of Israel.

36:26 26 A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

37 The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. 2 He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. 3 He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know."

Obadiah (c. 586 BCE)

Obadiah is condemnation of the nations such as Edom who participated in the destruction of Judah. There will come a judgment of the Lord upon the nations and Israel will be saved.

1:1 Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom: We have heard a report from the Lord, and a messenger has been sent among the nations: "Rise up! Let us rise against it for battle!"

Prophets After the Return

Second-Third Isaiah 40-66 (c. 530-515)

This prophet proclaims a new exodus in which the people of God will return from exile and live in the land once again. This section also contains the servant songs of Isaiah, which describe a deliverer for the people.

40 Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.4 Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.5 Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."... but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

42 Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.2 He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street;3 a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

43:10 You are my witnesses, says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.

45: 1 Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their robes, to open doors before him— and the gates shall not be closed:

53 Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?2 For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.3 He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering[a] and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.

55 Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.2 Why do you spend your

money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.³ Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

61 The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;

Haggai (520-525 BCE)

Haggai is one of the central figures in the rebuilding and rededication of the Temple. He saw the rebuilding and the reinstatement of the cultic practices as precursors to the messianic age. It would bring blessings upon God's people once again.

In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest: ² Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house

Zechariah (520 and 400s).

The first half as Zechariah focuses on the rebuilding of the Temple in the vein as Haggai. It is a desire for a purified community and a messianic age. The second half of the book is written during the Greek period. We find here a vision of the messiah who will be a prince of peace and a good shepherd.

1:1 In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah son of Iddo, saying: ² The Lord was very angry with your ancestors. ³ Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord of hosts: Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts.

9:9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Malachi (c. 500-415?)

Malachi prophecies during the period of the restoration of Israel, that time when the Temple is being rebuilt. His focus is on perfecting the cultic processes of the Temple. He encourages people to remain faithful and chastises priests who do not fulfill their duties appropriately. He also speaks of sin, repentance and judgment. In some ways he is a nice bridge to the period the New Testament. He is the last prophet in both the Jewish and Christian scriptures.

Joel (c. 400-350 BCE)

Joel is a cultic prophet who was familiar with Temple worship. He writes during the Persian period prior to the arrival of the Greeks. He uses a locust plague as a warning of the judgment of God. He also includes liturgical and apocalyptic elements.

2:28-30 [d] Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.29 Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

Jonah (c. 400-300 BCE))

Jonah is a counter vision of the exclusive nature of the Judaism of the returned exiles. Earlier prophets offer a vision of exclusion while Jonah offers one of inclusion.

Prophets of the Greek Period

Daniel (167-164 BCE)

Daniel is a prime example of apocalyptic literature. There are dreams and visions and foretelling of events that have already happened. This is a book used to encourage those who were undergoing terrible persecution at the hands of the Greeks.