

Introduction to the Prophetic Literature

- Isaiah is the first book listed in the English Bible written by a “writing prophet.” There were numerous prophets in the Old Testament period, but not all of them wrote down their prophecies (for example, Elijah and Elisha never did).
- The following chart illustrates some of the key differences between non-writing and writing prophets.

Non-writing Prophets	Writing Prophets
- tended to do many miracles, - to address individuals, and - to discuss immediate situations.	- tended <i>not</i> to do miracles, - to address nations as a whole, and - to discuss “big picture” concepts (such as the exile, return, and the Messiah).

- In the English Bible, the writing prophets are divided into
 - “Major Prophets”: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel; and
 - “Minor Prophets”: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, & Malachi.
- The designations “Major” and “Minor” refers to the length of each book, not their level of importance.
 - Note: In English Bibles, the book of Lamentations follows Jeremiah because, according to tradition, Jeremiah was the author.
- The writing prophets came from various regions within the nations of Israel and Judah (but especially from Jerusalem) and they came from all walks of life.

What was a prophet?

- Although the prophets are most well-known for their accurate predictions of the future, that was only a small (but important!) part of the role they played.
- Primarily, the prophets were God’s messengers, speaking His truth to His people and the nations. Sometimes those messages included future predictions, but often the messages addressed current issues.

- In addition, the term “covenant enforcers” captures the role of the prophets well.
 - o In the Mosaic Covenant, God had promised the Israelites blessings if they obeyed and curses if they disobeyed. By the time of the writing prophets, hundreds of years had passed since Israel stood at Mount Sinai, but the covenant was still in effect.
 - o The prophets were there to remind the people of their commitment as a nation. They called the people out for their disobedience to the covenant, and reminded them that judgment was coming if they did not repent. In accordance with the terms of the Mosaic Covenant, the ultimate punishment was exile.
 - o When they did predict the future, those predictions were related to their job as covenant enforcers, giving either hope of future blessings or a warning of coming judgments. The predictions also served to authenticate the speaker as a true prophet (instead of a false prophet which were common in those days).

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