

Week 3: The Spirit And Israel's Prophets

2 Peter 1:19-21

¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

“... are you building your whole life, in all its dimensions, on the truth of the Word of God? Is your worldview shaped by the Bible? Is the Bible not merely the object, but the subject, of your thinking? That is to say, the Bible should be not only something we *think about*, but something we *think with*. It is to provide the foundations for how we think about everything else and is to be the guide to how we act in all circumstances.”

Christopher J. H. Wright,
*Knowing the Holy Spirit through the
Old Testament*

What is a prophet?

- Biblical prophets are God's messengers, primarily calling people to

covenant accountability, repentance, reconciliation, and declaring God's plan for redemption and salvation. They also often warned of judgment and foretold future events.

What is prophecy?

- Biblical prophecy serves as a warning against sin and a promise of ultimate restoration, guiding people toward a relationship with God.
- These messages come in many forms: dreams, poetry, sermons, and even dramatic physical stunts—as when the prophet Isaiah went nude for three years to signify how the Assyrians would strip and shame the Egyptians (Isaiah 20:3).
- Prophecy is often perceived as exclusively about the future. However, biblical prophets also deliver messages concerning the past and present.

Who are the prophets?

Major (5)	Minor (12)
Isaiah	Hosea
Jeremiah	Joel
Lamentations (Jeremiah)	Amos
Ezekiel	Obadiah
Daniel	Jonah
	Micah
	Nahum
	Habakkuk
	Zephaniah
	Haggai

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Major (5)	Minor (12)
Isaiah	Hosea
Jeremiah	Joel
Lamentations (Jeremiah)	Amos
Ezekiel	Obadiah
	Zechariah
	Malachi

Prophets in the Bible who do not have a dedicated book named after them—often called "non-writing" or "non-canonical" prophets—include major historical figures such as **Moses, Abraham, Elijah, Elisha, Samuel, Nathan, David, and Deborah**. Others mentioned in historical books as speaking for God include Gad, Ahijah, Shemaiah, and Huldah.

Abraham — *“Then God said to him in the dream, 'Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore, I did not let you touch her. Now then, return the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live.’” (Genesis 20:6-7)*

Moses — *“Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face” (Dt 34:10)*

Joshua — *“And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him. So the people of Israel obeyed him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses.” (Deuteronomy 34:9)*

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Samuel — *And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the LORD.*
(1 Samuel 3:20)

Ezra — *“For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.”* (Ezra 7:10)

David — *“The Spirit of the LORD speaks by me; his word is on my tongue. (2 Samuel 23:2)*

“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. (Acts 2:29–31)

Guided by the Holy Spirit, dedicated individuals authored and safeguarded the Old Testament to maintain the faithfulness of God's people. Their message remains relevant and continues to speak to us today.

The prophetic books of the Old Testament (Isaiah through Malachi) make up roughly 25-30% of the Old Testament content by volume.

- **By the Books:** Of the 39 books in the Protestant Old Testament, 17 (about 43%) are prophetic books (Major

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and Minor), though they are often shorter than historical books.

- **By Content/Verses:** Analyses of the Hebrew text (e.g., J. Barton Payne's *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*) indicate that approximately **28.5%** of Old Testament verses are prophetic (6,641 out of 23,210 total).
- **The focus is on the present:** the prophets mostly warned and counseled the people of Israel about their own time.
- **The coming Messiah:** While the Old Testament largely details immediate, conditional warnings to Israel and Judah, it contains over 300 specific Messianic predictions about the Messiah's future.

Reading the Old Testament in the Hebrew order reveals a clearer macro-narrative. The overall story is structured as follows:

- **The Torah (Law/Instruction)** establishes God's people and the promised land.
- **The Nevi'im (Prophets)** recount how God's people lived in the Promised Land and in their eventual exile.
- **The Ketuvim (Writings)** focus primarily on how to live in exile and maintain trust in God's promises.

The Spirit and Israel's Prophets

Throughout Israel's history, prophets were empowered by the Spirit to authoritatively proclaim God's word. While some served briefly, most exercised extended ministries. This spiritual presence provided power for delivering messages of encouragement, rebuke, assurance, promise, and witness.

“Speaking through the prophets, God guided kings and people by telling them how to act in specific situations, warned people when they disobeyed him, predicted events that he would bring about, interpreted events when they came about, and demonstrated that he was both ruler of history and a God who relates personally to people.”

Wayne Grudem

Role of the Holy Spirit

The Spirit empowered prophets for their tasks by providing authority and power, primarily connected to the proclamation of God's word. The empowerment was both for specific situations and for continuous, long-term ministry.

- **Continuous Empowerment:**

Prophets like Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah and Micaiah ministered over extended periods, with the Spirit's presence remaining upon them after their commissioning.

- **From birth:** Jeremiah 1:5

“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.”

- **Situational Empowerment:**

Figures such as Azariah, Jahaziel, and Zechariah—who did not primarily serve as full-time prophets—were empowered by the Spirit at crucial times to deliver messages of encouragement, assurance, or rebuke.

- **Azariah:** 2 Chronicles 15:1-2 ¹

The Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded, ²and he went out to meet Asa and said to him, “Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: The LORD is with you while you are with

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him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you.

- **Revelation and Proclamation:**

For prophets like Ezekiel, the Spirit was central to understanding, applying, and proclaiming God's word, even transporting the prophet in visionary experiences. The combination of the Spirit and God's words points to the purpose of being witnesses to God's salvation.

- **The coming Messiah** would fully embody this Holy Spirit empowerment, displaying all that was partially present in the prophets. With the Messiah's arrival came the promise of the Spirit's widespread, permanent presence with God's people, enabling them to witness the truth that Yahweh alone is Savior.

Holy Spirit Empowerment for Prophets and Proclamation:

Micah 3:8: "But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin."

2 Samuel 23:2: "The Spirit of the Lord speaks through me; his words are upon my tongue." (David)

Ezekiel 2:2: "And the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me."

Isaiah 61:1: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor..."

Compelled by the Spirit

1 Kings 22:13-14

¹³ And the messenger who went to summon Micaiah said to him, "Behold, the words of the prophets with one accord are favorable to the king. Let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably." ¹⁴ But Micaiah said, "As the LORD lives, what the LORD says to me, that I will speak."

Jeremiah 20:8-9

⁸ For whenever I speak, I cry out, I 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," there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.

Balaam and Balak (Numbers 22-24)

- **The Request:** King Balak of Moab, terrified by the encroaching Israelites, summons the renowned prophet Balaam to curse them.
- **The Talking Donkey:** While traveling, Balaam beats his donkey for refusing to move, not realizing it is avoiding an angel with a sword. God opens the donkey's mouth to speak to Balaam.
- **The Blessings:** Instead of cursing, Balaam tells Balak he can only speak what God puts in his mouth. He delivers four profound blessings on Israel.

- **The Outcome:** Balaam is unable to curse Israel and leaves without his reward.
- **First & Second Oracles (Numbers 23):** Emphasize God's inability to lie or change His mind, affirming the promise of the land of Canaan and Israel's unique status as a blessed people.
- **Third & Fourth Oracles (Numbers 24):** Foretell Israel's beauty, strength, and victory over enemies, including the prophecy of a "star" and "scepter" that would rise from Israel to destroy surrounding nations like Moab.

The Impact of Prophetic Ministry

The influence of the prophets extends beyond simple fortune-telling. Their ministry served three crucial purposes for God's people:

- **Covenant Accountability and Restoration:** The prophets functioned as God's moral compass for His people, constantly calling Israel and Judah back to covenant faithfulness. By warning of judgment (exile) and promising restoration (return), they ensured the nation understood the consequence of their sin and the faithfulness of God's redemptive plan.
- **Spiritual Authority and Mediation:** Empowered by the Holy Spirit, they acted as authoritative intermediaries, delivering God's word directly. This laid the foundation for distinguishing true divine authority from false human interpretation.
- **Hope for the Future:** Especially during and after the exile, prophetic messages provided a vital message of hope, pointing toward a new covenant, a remnant's return, and the ultimate arrival

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of the anointed Messiah, who would fulfill all the promises and usher in the age of the Spirit.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Hebrews 1:1-2

¹ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

Luke 24:25-27

²⁵ And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Next: *The Spirit and John the Baptist*