

# Introduction to Minor Prophets

## (1) Who are the prophets?



### Exodus 6:28 - 7:2

<sup>6:28</sup> On the day when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, <sup>29</sup> the LORD said to Moses, "I am the LORD; tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you." <sup>30</sup> But Moses said to the LORD, "Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips. How will Pharaoh listen to me?" <sup>7:1</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, "**See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet.**" <sup>2</sup> You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land.

### Exodus 4:10-16

<sup>10</sup> But Moses said to the LORD, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue." <sup>11</sup> Then the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" <sup>12</sup> Now therefore go, and **I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.**"

<sup>13</sup> But he said, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else." <sup>14</sup> Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, "Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart." <sup>15</sup> You shall speak to him and **put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do.** <sup>16</sup> He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him.

### Numbers 12:6-8

<sup>6</sup> And the LORD said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. <sup>7</sup> Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. <sup>8</sup> **With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD.**

Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"

### Isaiah 6:9

And the LORD said, "Go, and say to this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'"

## (2) When did prophets arise in biblical history? What are the major categories of prophets?

(a) *Who was the first prophet?*

(b) *What is the difference between the “non-writing prophets” and the “writing prophets”?*

(c) *What is the difference between the “Major Prophets” and the “Minor Prophets”?*

**(3) What was the chief role of the prophets?  
Theology” ~**

**~ Brief introduction to “Covenant**

*(a) The story of salvation in two covenants:*

**Genesis 2:15-17**

<sup>15</sup> The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. <sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, <sup>17</sup> **but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.**"

**Romans 3:20-22**

<sup>20</sup> For by **works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight**, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. <sup>21</sup> But now the **righteousness of God** has been manifested **apart from the law**, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – <sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

**Genesis 15:5-6**

<sup>5</sup> And the LORD brought Abraham outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then the LORD said to him, "So shall your offspring be." <sup>6</sup> And **Abraham believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.**

*(b) But what about the Mosaic Covenant? Is it a covenant of grace or a covenant of works?*

**Leviticus 18:4-5**

<sup>4</sup>You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God. <sup>5</sup> You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; **if a person does them, he shall live by them:** I am the LORD.

**Galatians 3:9-12**

<sup>9</sup>So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. <sup>10</sup>For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." <sup>11</sup>Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." <sup>12</sup>But **the law is not of faith**, rather "**The one who does them shall live by them.**"

**Galatians 3:16-17**

<sup>6</sup>Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. <sup>17</sup>This is what I mean: **the law**, which came 430 years afterward, **does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void.**

*(c) So what was the purpose of the Mosaic Covenant? The answer is complex.*

*Foundationally, the Mosaic Covenant was a “covenant of grace” – the righteous live by faith.*

*But on another level, the Mosaic Covenant was a “covenant of works” – for keeping the Promised Land.*

*If Israel obeyed, they would stay in the land and prosper. If Israel disobeyed, they would experience Exile.*

*In this way, Israel re-dramatized Adam in the Garden of Eden.*

*Like Adam, Israel in disobeying was expelled from paradise. Thus, Israel learned the gospel through failure.*

<b>Eden</b>	→	<b>Promised Land</b>	→	<b>The New Earth</b>
<i>Covenant of Works</i>		<i>Mosaic Covenant</i>		<i>Covenant of Grace</i>
<b>Adam</b> (fails)		<b>Israel</b> (fails)		<b>Jesus</b> (succeeds)
Heaven on Probation		Symbol of Heaven		Reality of Heaven

**Genesis 2:8-12 [Eden – the promise of heaven if Adam obeys]**

<sup>8</sup> And the LORD God planted a **garden** in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. <sup>9</sup> And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up **every tree that is pleasant** to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. <sup>10</sup> A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden.

### **Revelation 22:1-2 [New Heavens and New Earth – the final reality of heaven]**

<sup>1</sup> Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

### **Deuteronomy 8:7-9 [The Promised Land – a temporary picture of heaven in the Mosaic Covenant]**

<sup>7</sup> For the LORD your God is bringing you into a **good land**, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, <sup>8</sup> a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, <sup>9</sup> a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper.

### **Deuteronomy 30:15-18**

<sup>15</sup> See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. <sup>16</sup> **If you obey the commandments** of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, **then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land** that you are entering to take possession of it. <sup>17</sup> **But if** your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, <sup>18</sup> I declare to you today, that **you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land** that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess.

**(4) What was the role of the prophets in the Mosaic Covenant? They were covenant prosecutors.**

### **Isaiah 1**

<sup>2</sup> Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth;  
for the LORD has spoken:

*Calling of witnesses*

Children have I reared and brought up,  
but they have rebelled against me.

*The Indictment*

<sup>3</sup> The ox knows its owner,  
and the donkey its master's crib,  
but Israel does not know,  
my people do not understand.

<sup>4</sup> Ah, sinful nation,  
a people laden with iniquity,  
offspring of evildoers,  
children who deal corruptly!  
They have forsaken the LORD,  
they have despised the Holy One of Israel,  
they are utterly estranged.

<sup>18</sup> Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD:  
though your sins are like scarlet,

*Call to Repentance*

they shall be as white as snow;  
though they are red like crimson,  
they shall become like wool.  
<sup>19</sup> If you are willing and obedient,  
you shall eat the good of the land;  
<sup>20</sup> but if you refuse and rebel,  
you shall be eaten by the sword;  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

<sup>24</sup> Therefore the Lord declares,  
the LORD of hosts,  
the Mighty One of Israel:  
Ah, I will get relief from my enemies  
and avenge myself on my foes.  
<sup>25</sup> I will turn my hand against you  
and will smelt away your dross as with lye  
and remove all your alloy.

*The Verdict*

<sup>30</sup> For you shall be like an oak  
whose leaf withers,  
and like a garden without water.  
<sup>31</sup> And the strong shall become tinder,  
and his work a spark,  
and both of them shall burn together,  
with none to quench them.

<sup>2:2</sup> It shall come to pass in the latter days  
that the mountain of the house of the LORD  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be lifted up above the hills;  
and all the nations shall flow to it.

*Hope of Gospel*

## N o t e s

### (1) Who are the prophets?

There are three offices in the Old Testament – prophet, priest and king. All three offices are mediatory offices. (The king rules over the people as God’s representative. And the king is the federal head of the people so that the king’s obedience or disobedience is credited to the people.)

Roughly speaking, prophets speak for God through oracles. And priests represent the people by offering sacrifices.

Notice that people have no direct access to God. Because the Bible recognizes a vast gulf between humanity and God because of sin and thus you cannot just approach God. We need mediators, intercessors.

**Prophet**

no tribal requirement  
not tied to any institution  
(outside system, ‘renegade’)  
called specifically by God

**Priest**

Levites  
Temple, offer sacrifices  
(insider, connected to king and paid by state)  
not especially called, but born into office

**Exodus 6.** The clearest passage the Bible gives us about the role of the prophet is here. Moses will be like God to pharaoh, and Aaron will be like Moses’ prophet. Moses will speak to Aaron, and Aaron in turn will speak to pharaoh. Notice, again, no direct access, but the prophet is a mediator.

**Exodus 4.** If we go back a couple of chapters, we see that Moses was not confident of his ability to speak. And so Aaron his brother is appointed to be Moses’ mouthpiece. Because Aaron was Moses’ brother, there was an intimacy and connection there that Moses did not have with pharaoh – and thus Moses is free to talk but only with Aaron. This shows us that God has a special relationship with his prophets that he does not have with the people. This is not because God is afraid, but rather because of the sinfulness of the people. And so the prophet qualifies as the mediator because of his close relationship.

**Numbers 12.** The other thing we learn about prophets is that while God speaks plainly to his prophets, the prophet’s words are not plain speech to us. They are garbed in riddles and visionary, dream-like language. In other words, God purposefully speaks through his prophets in a way that is difficult to understand. Why? So that the true meaning can be hidden from those that do not fear God. It takes spiritual discernment and humility. For thus says Isaiah 6:9 – there is a hearing and seeing that is not really hearing or seeing.

As a practical matter, it also means that we shouldn’t read the prophets in a wooden, overly-literal way. The prophets speak in images and metaphors and allusions. It takes a lot of work to think through and try to understand. This can be discouraging for people since we want quick and easy spiritual pick-me-ups. But it’s not easy to read OT prophets.

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**(2) When did prophets arise in biblical history? What are the major categories of prophets?****(a) Who was the first prophet?**

Bit of a trick question. Hard to say definitively who was God’s first prophet. Any number of people could fulfill this role. Certainly Moses is called a prophet. Certainly we could say Noah was a prophet. But the first prophet in the classical sense is Samuel. Samuel is a transitional figure and he anoints King Saul and King David. The prophet par excellence without dispute is Elijah. Elijah comes onto the scene at the darkest moment in Israel’s history, during the reign of Ahab. He courageously confronts the sin of Ahab and Jezebel – most famously at Mt. Carmel. Thus, when Jesus goes up the Mount of Transfiguration, he meets with Moses and Elijah, representing the sum total of biblical revelation – law and prophecy.

**(b) What is the difference between the “non-writing prophets” and the “writing prophets”?**

Sometime about 150 years after Israel splits into two kingdoms, prophets start writing down their prophecies. Prior to this, prophets spoke but did not write books. Of course prophets like Samuel

probably wrote portions of history (like 1 Samuel), but not prophesy as we know it. Amos was probably the first prophet to write down a book.

Why did this change happen? We're not sure. It might have something to do with the fact that prior to Amos, the prophets were trying to speak to kings and persuade them to repent; and after Amos, the prophets were mostly focused on speaking to the people (thus the need to write it down). It could be the spread of literacy. Certainly, the writing prophets, being latter in biblical history, are more dire in their pronouncements than the earlier non-writing prophets.

### (c) What is the difference between the “Major Prophets” and the “Minor Prophets”?

Simply the length of their writings. The labels do not distinguish who are more important, but it's just a category to distinguish the longer books from the shorter books. There are five major prophet books – Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and Daniel. There are 12 minor prophets. What's great about the minor prophets is that their books are so short – most just three chapters. Prophecy is already hard to read, but reading 3 chapters makes it a bit easier.

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### (3) What was the chief role of the prophets? Theology” ~

~ Brief introduction to “Covenant

#### (a) The story of salvation in two covenants:

**Genesis 2** – What theologians call the “**Covenant of Works.**” If Adam obeys, then paradise with God. If Adam disobeys, death and judgment. Notice the “if...then” language. It depends on Adam's works.

**Romans 3** – Because of the Fall, Paul says that the “works of the law” cannot justify us (v. 20). That path is closed because of Adam's sin. Rather, the law serves now to tell us we are sinners. But the gospel is that we have “righteousness” not through obeying the law, but through faith in Christ, who obeys the law on our behalf (v. 21). This is called the “**Covenant of Grace.**” Notice no “if...then” language. It does not depend on our obedience or anything we do. We receive it by faith, but faith is not a “good work” we give to God. It is entirely of grace.

Thus – these two covenants are diametrically opposed. Adam was under the Covenant of Works – without Christ and wholly dependent on himself obeying. Christians are under the Covenant of Grace – with Christ as our substitute obeying for us, and this salvation we receive by grace. (Note, Christ saves us by fulfilling the original Covenant of Works.)

Prior to Genesis 3, it was the Covenant of Works. After the Fall, God's people are under the Covenant of Grace. How do know this? Look at **Genesis 15** – where Abraham is credited with righteousness, not by his obedience, but by faith. In fact, Paul is describing the Covenant of Grace, cites Abraham as the classic example. Thus, everyone after Adam is saved by grace – Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, etc. There is one Covenant of Grace that expands over all biblical history, over the church, Israel, the Patriarchs – everyone.

#### **Biblical History:**

*Covenant Works*

*Covenant of Grace*

**(b) But what about the Mosaic Covenant? Is it a covenant of grace or a covenant of works?**

Ah, here is where things get complicated. But what about the covenant at Mt. Sinai given through Moses? Parts of the Mosaic Covenant reads very much like the Covenant of Works – complete with the same “if...then” language.

**Lev. 18** – “if you obey the law, then you will live.” This is the principle of law and works. We know this because Paul in **Galatians 3:12** cites the Leviticus passage as an example of being justified by the law. Paul writes, “the law is not of faith.” In other words, Paul puts the Mosaic Covenant under the Covenant of Works – opposed to the Covenant of Grace which operates on faith.

But then just a few verses later, in **Galatians 3:17**, Paul specifically says the Mosaic Covenant did not “annul” or cancel the Abrahamic Covenant of Grace. It didn’t make “the promise [given to Abraham] void.”

Thus, what we learn here is that the Mosaic Covenant (which covers the period of the Exodus all the way to the New Testament) is both a Covenant of Works and a Covenant of Grace. It has both elements.

This is very, very confusing. How can it be both? How can someone be justified by faith through grace (Covenant of Grace) and live if the law is obeyed (Covenant of Works)? It can’t be both.

**(c) So what was the purpose of the Mosaic Covenant? The answer is complex.**

The key to resolving this mystery is to realize that foundationally, the Mosaic Covenant is a “covenant of grace”. Everyone under the Mosaic Covenant was justified by faith in the coming Messiah. No one is saved by their works.

But the Mosaic Covenant is a “covenant of works” for keeping the land. This is where the “if...then” language operates. If Israel obeys the covenant, then Israel will prosper in the land. If Israel disobeys, then Israel will be expelled from the land. This is made clear in **Deuteronomy 30:15-18**. The conditional nature of the covenant didn’t have to do with salvation, but with the land.

This was a re-dramatization of Adam in the Garden of Eden. The Promised Land of Canaan is supposed to evoke the garden paradise of Eden. Descriptions of the Promised Land, flowing with milk and honey, is a deliberate echo of Eden. In other words, Israel is back where Adam was in the garden. And just like Adam, Israel disobeys and is expelled East of paradise – in this case, east to Babylon.

Or, another way to look at it is to see the Promised Land as a foretaste of heaven. Remember Israel is rescued from slavery in Egypt (sin), goes through the wilderness (Christian life), across the Jordan River (death), to the Promised Land (heaven).



In each case, Eden, the Promised Land – all are pictures of the ultimate reality which is the New Heavens and New Earth described in Revelation 21. The sustaining motif is a paradisiacal garden.

Ah, but here is the important question. Why does God make Israel re-enact Adam's test in the Garden? Answer – to teach Israel the lesson of the garden, which is that “by the works of the law, no human being can be justified in God's sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:20) It was to teach Israel through the long saga of her history that she cannot even obey the lesser requirement of the Mosaic Covenant to keep a lesser garden, Canaan. So that through centuries of failure and defeat and finally exile, God's people would realize in a profound way that righteousness does not come through the law, but only through faith in Christ. As Paul says in Galatians, the law is a tutor, leading us to Christ (Galatians 3:24).

**(4) What was the role of the prophets in the Mosaic Covenant? They were covenant prosecutors.**

Now we are prepared to understand the role of the prophets in the Mosaic Covenant. The prophets come to Israel after they have failed the test – they have broken the Mosaic Covenant.

The prophets were God's prosecuting attorneys – indicting the people for breaking the covenant. Think of a court-room scene. The prophets are God's prosecutors. The accused are the people of Israel. The prophets lay out the case against Israel in meticulous detail, drawing attention to all her sins and why justice demands Exile from the land.

But the prophets are not all gloom. For within the writings, there are glimmers of hope. Though Exile is inevitable, the prophets speak of God's forgiveness and restoration – which points us to Christ and the coming “*New Covenant*” of the New Testament, which is really the “*Covenant of Grace*” come to fruition.

We see this pattern again and again throughout the Minor Prophets. And this helps us to read and situate the writings. Israel has broken their covenant with God. They deserve death and exile. The prophets plead with the people to repent, even now God's mercy is near, but the people obstinately continue in their sin. Exile will come. But, by the free grace of God, there will be a restoration and a salvation for a remnant of God's people. And a coming Messiah, the seed of King David, will rescue God's people, not only from enemies and conquest, but from sin and death itself.