|  |
| --- |
| How to Read OT Prophecy |
|  |  |  |
| **Prophecy as a Genre of Literature** |

# What Prophecy is *NOT*:

Most people understand the term “prophecy” as *the prediction of future events.* This definition is inadequate and does not account for huge amounts of the material in the prophetic books. While there are certain passages within the prophets which do contain predictive elements, it is not predictive.

# What Prophecy *IS*:

Prophecy is a message given directly by God to his prophet, who serves as a spokesman to convey that message to the hearers and readers. The prophet speaks the words of Yahweh as his mouthpiece; they contain the quoted speech of God himself. Anytime this takes place, we are dealing with prophecy. Thus Moses is rightly labeled as a “prophet” for communicating God’s law to God’s people, even though very little of Moses’ writings are predictive.

* **Key Biblical Texts which define or illustrate the nature of prophecy:** **Exodus 6:28–7:2; 2 Samuel 23:2; Micah 3:8**

# What Prophetic books *ARE*:

The fifteen prophetic books (3 + 12) are a narrative representation of the message of the Israelite prophets, set within the larger narrative context of the TaNaK, specifically the unified narrative of Genesis—Kings. These books accomplish a number of important goals within this collection:

* **Key biblical texts that discuss the composition of the prophetic scrolls:** **Isaiah 8:10-20; Jeremiah 36**

# Background and Context: The Covenant Story

The prophets are best understood as “**Covenant Watchdogs**”: They assume the larger covenant story of Yahweh, creation, and Israel.

# Main Themes in the Prophetic Books:

1. ACCUSATIONS that Israel and the Nations have REBELLED against Yahweh
2. CALLS FOR REPENTANCE: admonition to turn from wicked ways and return to faithful obedience to Yahweh
3. WARNINGS OF the coming DAY OF YAHWEH will address injustice and rebellion: this refers to historical events that God will use to judge evil and vindicate the righteous, all leading up to the great future day when God will do this for all creation—a cosmic “house-cleaning.”
4. ANNOUNCEMENTS OF RESTORATION AND HOPE are on the other side of judgment

# Literary Forms and features occurring in prophecy:

1. The use of the phrase, “Thus says the LORD: . . .” indicates the claim made by the prophets that they are actually speaking for God. This phrase usually marks a new structural division as well.
2. Quoted speech of God: There is a lot of first-person frame of reference, ie “I,” “me,” “my,” and “mine” referring to Yahweh (rather than the prophetic author). Most often when God speaks, it is in poetic verse.
3. Rhetorical questions are used extensively
4. Lawsuit: a legal charge brought against Israel/Judah for having broken the terms of their covenant with God.
5. Symbolic actions by the prophets
6. The use of satire and irony: Prophecy which seeks to instruct, amend, and reform, and at times offend.

# Guidelines for Interpreting Prophecy

1. Determine the *literary type* you are dealing with in each section.
2. Recognize that prophecy is organized topically “symphonically” rather than chronologically or sequentially.
3. Identify *figurative language*.
4. Investigate whether the passage is using *earlier Scriptures*
5. Determine the author’s *purpose* from the text.
6. Be on the lookout for *dramatic literary techniques*.