

**DROPHETS**  
OF THE  
*Old*  
*Testament*

**E. Keith Howick**

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*Prophets of the Old Testament*

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## **Prophets of the Old Testament**

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# Introduction

When we hear the word “prophet,” we usually think of someone who foretells the future or prophesies about it. Although that is one of the things a prophet may do, it is not the only thing he (and occasionally she) does. A prophet teaches, preaches, calls to repentance, corrects moral wrongs, elucidates religious truths, and from time to time, prophesies. He denounces sin and announces the punishment attributable to it. He is a spokesperson for God, authorized to speak in His name and make His will known to humankind.

The prophets of the Old Testament taught both by word and deed; their actions at times a spiritual “show and tell” of what God had in mind. “The ordinary Hebrew word for prophet is *nabi*, derived from a verb signifying ‘to bubble forth’ like a fountain; hence the word means one *who announces* or *pours forth* the declarations of God.”<sup>1</sup>

Generally speaking, almost everyone classifies the prophets of the Old Testament into major and minor prophets. The four major prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel; the minor prophets comprise Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and

<sup>1</sup> Smith's Bible Dictionary: Prophet.

Malachi— sixteen in all, whose names grace a like number of Old Testament books. The division is not founded on whether any one of the sixteen prophets named is greater or more important than another, but rather on the length of their books. However, this is an artificial classification which may limit the number of prophets to those who wrote books, thereby omitting many others.

There are many prophets identified in the Old Testament. In addition, there are multiple false prophets either referred to generally or identified by name. Even King Saul was once spoken of as a prophet which created the proverb, “Is Saul also among the prophets?”<sup>2</sup> In fact, all men and women in the Old Testament who spoke for and in behalf of the Lord while under the influence of the Spirit can and should be referred to as a prophet or a prophetess, whether they are prophesying, teaching, reproving, or merely delivering a message.



This book is divided into an Introduction, seven Sections, and forty-one Chapters. Once Israel is divided into two kingdoms, some of the prophets minister to both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. Those prophets are treated in the section where most of their ministries were served. Generally speaking, the scriptural quotes used in the chapters come from the references cited at the beginning of each chapter. Other scriptural and bibliographical references are cited only in footnotes.

There are four charts containing factual information about the prophets and one that identifies the lost books of the Old Testament. There is also one map that shows the various routes (thought to be potential alternate routes) used by the children of Israel as they traveled in the wilderness after the Exodus. Following the name of each prophet is the approximate date that he or she lived or served.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 10:12.



This book is *about* the prophets: who they were, what they did, when they lived (as accurately as those dates can be determined),<sup>3</sup> where they came from, where they went, their personalities, their ministries, and what their mission's were—in other words, their *stories*.

God speaks through prophets. Amos states definitively that, “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.”<sup>4</sup> Some Old Testament prophets were accepted, some counseled with, some feared, some rejected, some arrested, some imprisoned, some tortured, some killed, and some enslaved. Because God has given us free agency, we have a choice—to believe and follow the prophets, to disbelieve and reject them, or to ignore them. But what *we* do, has nothing to do with whether God has empowered His prophets. Prophets affect everything and everyone. To say that they are important is an understatement; to say that they are always believed is an overstatement. But to say that they *are*, is an absolute. Read and enjoy *Prophets of the Old Testament*.

<sup>3</sup> Dates are either taken from Smith's Bible Dictionary or determined as best as possible from the kings surrounding the time of their ministry. <sup>4</sup> Amos 3:7.

# A Man of God out of Judah & The Old Prophet from Bethel

*circa 975–954 B.C.*

*1 Kings 12:25–33; 13:1–32; 2 Kings 23:15–18*

There are fifty-seven prophets or groups of prophets in the Old Testament who are identified in one way or another.<sup>5</sup> Let me introduce two of them whose stories are rather bizarre. They appear when Jeroboam was made king of the Northern Kingdom (or Kingdom of Israel), about 975 B.C. Soon thereafter, he became concerned that his people would go up to worship at the temple in Jerusalem and decide to become subjects of Rehoboam, who ruled the Kingdom of Judah. To keep this from happening, Jeroboam made two golden calves and built altars before them so that his priests could burn incense and offer sacrifices in his domain. He placed these golden calves in the geographical extremes of his kingdom—one in Dan and the other in Bethel—and designated them as gods. He appointed his own priests and excluded those from the tribe of Levi. The people were commanded to pay homage to these calf-like gods, to accept Jeroboam's priests, and to recognize Dan and Bethel as their official places of worship and sacrifice. Once the golden calves and altars were installed, the king “ordained” a feast for the people. Upon the

<sup>5</sup> There are several prophets mentioned in the Book of Mormon who lived during Old Testament times. Although some of those records were available to the Book of Mormon

people, they are not dealt with here because they are not mentioned in the Old Testament itself.

day of the feast, he burned incense and offered sacrifice on the altar at Bethel. In doing these things, Jeroboam committed a great sin.

While Jeroboam was worshiping at the altar in Bethel, the Lord sent an unnamed prophet the scriptures refer to as the *man of God out of Judah* to him to censure him for his idolatrous practices. This unnamed prophet condemned the golden altars and prophesied that a child named Josiah would arise out of the house of David, destroy the wicked priests, and desecrate the altar of Jeroboam by burning dead men's bones upon it. As a sign that his prophecies would come to pass, he said the altar would immediately be broken open and the ashes of past offerings "poured out" or scattered upon the ground.

The *man of God out of Judah* made these prophecies just as Jeroboam placed his hands upon the altar. Jeroboam listened to the prophecies, took one hand from the altar, and pointed his finger toward the man of God, bellowing, "Lay hold on him." But instead of the prophet being detained, three successive miracles occurred. First, the hand Jeroboam used to point to the man of God "dried up," and he could not return it to his side. Second, the altar was rent apart and the ashes it contained were poured out upon the ground. Jeroboam was astonished and must have been contrite, because he begged the man of God to pray for him and restore his hand to normal. The man of God offered a prayer and the third miracle occurred when Jeroboam's hand was restored.

In gratitude, King Jeroboam asked the man of God to dine with him and receive a reward for his services. But the man of God refused, declaring that he had been told by the Lord that he could neither eat nor drink in that "place" (Bethel), and must depart, which he immediately did. Having learned little or nothing from these miraculous experiences, Jeroboam was soon back to his idolatrous ways.

The story now introduces the unnamed *old prophet from Bethel*. This prophet's sons tell him about the strange happenings in Bethel and the prophecies of the *man of God out of Judah*. The old prophet pursues the man of God and finds him resting in the shade of an

oak tree. The *old prophet from Bethel* invites the man of God to come with him and eat, to which the *man of God out of Judah* repeats that he must not eat nor drink in this “place.” But lying to the man of God, the prophet from Bethel tells him that an angel has sent him to bring the man of God back so that he can be refreshed by food and drink. The *man of God out of Judah* believes the lie of the prophet from Bethel and accompanies him to his lodgings. After the meal, the *old prophet from Bethel* turns around and condemns the *man of God out of Judah* for disobeying the commandment not to eat or drink in Bethel and states that as a result, the man of God’s remains would not rest in the sepulcher of his fathers. This prophecy was promptly fulfilled, for as the *man of God out of Judah* left Bethel, he was attacked by a lion and killed. Strangely, the donkey the man of God was riding—along with the killer lion—were found stoically standing guard over the body.

When the *old prophet from Bethel* heard of the man of God’s death, he retrieved the body and buried it in his own sepulcher. He even requested that when he died, his body be laid to rest next to the dead man of God—concluding that all that the *man of God out of Judah* had prophesied would surely come to pass

But that’s not the end of the story . . . .

Many years later, just as foreseen by the *man of God out of Judah*, the child Josiah is born into the house of David and eventually becomes the king in Judah. In his attempt to restore true worship to all Israel, he destroys the altar at Bethel, takes bones from the sepulchers there, and burns them upon the altar—thus polluting it and fulfilling the prophecies of the *man of God out of Judah*. Josiah sees a title over another sepulcher and asks whose sepulcher it is. He is told that it is the sepulcher of the man of God who had prophesied all that had taken place. Josiah orders that the sepulcher not be disturbed. Thus, the bones of the *man of God out of Judah* and the bones of the *old prophet from Bethel* remained undisturbed . . . perhaps even to this day.

# The School of the Prophets

*circa 1050–640 B.C.*

*1 Samuel 10:5–12; 19:19–21; 2 Kings 2:3–7, 15–17; 4:38–43;  
6:1–7; 22:14; Amos 7:14*

Disciples of the prophets were called “sons” in the scriptures, just as teachers and others were sometimes called “father.” The title, “School of the Prophets,” is not used in the Bible. It was used in the early restoration of the Church when such a school was established to prepare the early brethren to administer the gospel.<sup>83</sup> However, it has always been assumed that the general references in the Bible to “groups” of prophets referred to schools of instruction and worship.

The first reference to these groups of prophets is recorded by Samuel as he prophesied to Saul that he would meet “a company of prophets” with various musical instruments. Samuel continued, stating that Saul would also prophesy and be “turned into another man.” All this occurred as Samuel foretold and the proverb went abroad, “Is Saul also among the prophets?”

Such a company of prophets is mentioned with Samuel “standing as appointed over them.” Samuel has been accredited as being the founder of the schools for the prophets. It appears that these schools were located in Bethel, in Rama, in Jericho, in Gilgal, and even in Jerusalem. The schools were apparently quite large. In Gilgal a hundred students are spoken of and in Jericho at least

<sup>83</sup> Doctrine & Covenants 88:127–39.

fifty. The scriptures state that the prophetess Huldah was located “in the college” at Jerusalem when she was consulted by the priest, Hilkiah.

There is a very interesting story about one of these groups of prophets that involved Elisha. The group, called “sons of the prophets,” informed Elisha that their physical facilities were inadequate, and they want to build larger or additional ones. Elisha agreed and told them to proceed. But they wanted Elisha to accompany them, so he complied. They proceeded to the Jordan River and began cutting timber for construction when one of the axe heads flew off its handle and sank in the river. The worker who had been using the axe was extremely concerned, because it was a borrowed axe. Elisha asked where the head fell, and after being shown the location, cast a stick into the Jordan over the spot. A curious miracle then occurred; the axe head rose to the surface and “swam” to the bank so that it could be retrieved! A story unique in all of scripture.

The scriptures don’t indicate how long the schools of the prophets operated. They are only mentioned during the times of Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha. Jezebel tried to destroy all of these schools during the time of Elijah. Obadiah, governor of the king’s house at that time, told Elijah that he had saved one hundred of the students by hiding them by fifties in caves.<sup>84</sup> Perhaps Amos’ statement that he was neither a prophet nor a prophet’s son might indicate that the schools were no longer in operation during his time.

<sup>84</sup> 1 Kings 18:3–13.

# Nathan

1015 B.C.

2 Samuel 7:1–17; 12; 1 Kings 1; 1 Chronicles 17:1–15; 2 Chronicles 9:29

The name Nathan means *God has given* or *He has given*. Principally, Nathan was a prophet and counselor to David and Solomon.

There are only three events described in detail during Nathan's term as prophet. The first event occurred when David called Nathan to him and stated that he wanted to build a "house" that the Lord could dwell in. The record of that request and the answer is given in both I Samuel and I Chronicles. David had built his own palace and stated that while he lived in a house of cedar, the Ark of God, considered to be the presence of God among them, resided in a house of "curtains," meaning the tabernacle or tent. The word of the Lord came to Nathan and recounted what God had done for Israel and how He had established David as its king, but it would not be David who would build the house of the Lord—it would be his son, Solomon. However, the Lord would be "father" to the son of David, and the son of David would be a "son" to the Lord. He further stated that the Lord's mercy would not depart from him.

The second event involves the chastening of David for his adultery with Bathsheba and the killing of Uriah the Hittite. The story of David and Bathsheba is well-known. While walking on the roof of his house, David saw a woman in her bath. She was

“very beautiful to look upon.” David inquired after the woman and was told that her name was Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite. David sent messengers to bring Bathsheba to him and eventually, adultery took place. Their union left Bathsheba with child. When she told David of this he sent for Uriah, who was off fighting with the army.

When Uriah came home that evening, David told him to spend time with his wife; but instead, Uriah slept at the door of the king’s house. When David asked Uriah why he didn’t go home he responded, “The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? as thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing.”

David had Uriah tarry another day and gave him food and wine and made him drunk. Uriah spent the night with David’s servants, but he still would not go to his house. So the next morning David sent him back to the battle with written instructions to Joab that Uriah be placed in the forefront of the battle, after which the troops were to withdraw. Uriah would be left alone and would undoubtedly be killed. Joab followed these curious instructions and Uriah died.

The rebuke of David by Nathan came in the form of a parable to entrap the king. It was a tale of two men: one was poor with “nothing save one little ewe lamb,” the other rich with “many flocks and herds.” A banquet was held by the rich man for a visiting traveler. Rather than using an animal from his own extensive flock, the rich man took the poor man’s one and only ewe lamb to feed the traveler. David became angry and judged that the rich man should be punished, even that he “should surely die.” In addition, the rich man was to restore what was taken fourfold to the poor man, because “he had no pity.” Then Nathan told David: “Thou art the man . . . thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword [of the children of Ammon], and hast taken his wife to be thy wife.”

Nathan then pronounced the Lord's judgment upon David: David was doomed to be a violent king for the rest of his life, for as Nathan prophesied, the "sword shall never depart from thine house." In addition, David's "wives" would be defiled in public and the child that Bathsheba had conceived would die. Yet the Lord "put away" the sin of David, and David would not die. Although Bathsheba's first child with David did not survive, their second son became the great King Solomon.

The third event in the scriptures involving Nathan centered around the preservation of David's throne for Solomon. This occurred when David was old and near death. David's son, Adonijah, convinced some of David's leaders that he should be king, and they agreed to follow him. But Nathan and some others declined to do so. Adonijah called together the sons of David (except Solomon) and prepared a banquet preparatory to securing his succession. All this was done without David's knowledge. Nathan, aware that Solomon should be king, spoke to Bathsheba and convinced her that she should gain an audience with David and explain what was afoot. Bathsheba went to David first and then Nathan followed. They told David what Adonijah had done. Nathan then asked David if he wanted Adonijah to be king. David said no. They immediately called for a priest named Zadok, retrieved the "horn of oil" from the tabernacle, and anointed Solomon king of Israel.

These few passages of scripture clearly demonstrate that Nathan was a fearless prophet: blessing when blessings were warranted, rebuking when necessary, and ensuring that the Lord's will was carried out. Perhaps his other acts and further details of his life are not recorded in existing scriptures because they were recorded in his own book, "the book of Nathan the Prophet," one of the books of the Bible that was lost.

# Gad the Seer

1031 B.C.

1 Samuel 22:5; 2 Samuel 24:11–19; 1 Chronicles 21:9–19;  
29:29; 2 Chronicles 29:25

The name Gad means *good fortune*. He is referred to as both a seer and a prophet in the scriptures, sometimes in the same verse. He was an advisor to King David.

There are only three recorded instances involving Gad in the scriptures. The first is a singular verse noting that he advised David to remove from one location to another while David was hiding from King Saul. When an “evil” spirit came over Saul, David usually soothed him with his harp playing, but Saul had become extremely jealous of David and wanted to kill him because he had been anointed Israel’s next king and had become famous throughout all Israel. Hence, David went into hiding and avoided Saul for several years until Saul was killed during a war with the Philistines. It was during this period of hiding that Gad told David to move to a new location in order to preserve his life.

The second time we hear of Gad in the scriptures comes after David “numbered” Israel. He was *not* commanded by the Lord to number the people and in fact, was forbidden to do so; however, he persisted and numbered them anyway. Gad came to him after this and told him that the Lord was displeased and that he would punish all Israel for David’s disobedience. The Lord, through Gad, gave David three alternative punishments to choose from: a famine in the land for three years (recorded as seven years in II Samuel),

a three-month period when the enemies of Israel would defeat the Israelite armies, or a pestilence that would come upon all the people of Israel. David was reluctant to select from these painful choices and chose to subject himself to the Lord's choice.

The Lord chose the pestilence, and He immediately sent it upon all Israel. The scripture reports that seventy thousand people died. David pled with the Lord and questioned why the people had to suffer for his transgression. As the angel of the Lord was about to destroy Jerusalem with the pestilence, the Lord prevented it and told David (again through Gad) to raise an altar on the thrashing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. David bought the land and built an altar. He placed an offering on the altar and the Lord sent fire to consume it—causing David considerable consternation and fear. At that time the tabernacle was in Gibeon, but at that point, David would not go to Gibeon to offer sacrifices because he was afraid of the angel of destruction after witnessing the consumption of the burnt offering on the thrashing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

In the third instance, Gad assisted David and Nathan in placing Levites in the temple with musical instruments for use in the sacrificial services.

No other information about Gad the seer is available. Again, mention of him in the scriptures may be limited, perhaps due to the fact that he had written a book of his own, “the book of Gad the Seer,” in which he recorded the acts of David. His book is yet another of the lost books of the Bible.