

What are the Prophets? The Prophets are a *sequel* to the Law: the Law records God’s establishment of the covenant; the Prophets record God’s enforcement of the covenant. The Prophets are a *companion* to the historical books: the historical books are a record of Israel’s unfaithfulness to the covenant; the Prophets are a record of God’s words regarding her unfaithfulness.

Overview of the Prophets. There are three “major prophets” (four, counting Daniel) and twelve “minor prophets,” the distinction only having to do with the lengths of the books. The table below arranges them according to their date and audience:

	<i>To Israel</i>	<i>To other nations</i>	<i>To Judah</i>	<i>To Judeans in exile</i>
<i>Before fall of Israel</i>	Hos, Joel, Amos	Obad, Jonah	Isa, Mic	
<i>Before fall of Judah</i>		Nah	Jer, Hab, Zeph	
<i>Exile</i>				Ezek
<i>Post-exile</i>			Hag, Zech, Mal	Dan

Some of the books, especially the shorter ones, are difficult to date. I chose the dates that best followed the order of the books in the Bible (this also explains the strange ordering of the columns). For more detailed historical information, consult a Bible dictionary.

Reading the Prophets. There is a basic large-scale pattern to the prophets:

1. Condemnation and announcement of punishment. This is often couched in courtroom language and imagery, and the charge is always rooted in the Law. When specific offenses are listed it is helpful to try to match them up with events in the historical books.
2. Promise of restoration. Remember that these promises are fulfilled at two levels: first, the restoration of Judah as recorded in Ezra-Nehemiah; second, the new covenant which was established by Christ and has yet to be fulfilled.

There are basic small-scale building blocks called *oracles*, which are individual messages from God. Each prophet didn’t write down all his prophecies at once—sometimes this is made explicit when the oracles are dated. So we should look for boundaries between oracles. It seems to me, however, that this is not always easy.

Christ in the Prophets. I will try to point out all the prophecies that the New Testament explicitly cites as fulfilled in Christ and the Church. You will find that the New Testament writers often interpret prophecy in unexpected ways. Realize that their interpretive methods were not the same as today’s (in this respect we might emulate them), and, moreover, that they were under divine inspiration (in this respect we can’t emulate them). Like them, we should read the Prophets with the expectation that they speak of Christ (Lk 24.27).