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HOW TO UNDERSTAND AND APPLY
THE OLD TESTAMENT



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HOW TO UNDERSTAND AND APPLY THE OLD TESTAMENT

TWELVE STEPS FROM EXEGESIS TO THEOLOGY



Jason S. DeRouchie

FOREWORD BY D. A. CARSON

Prophecy and Law

The Distinctive Nature of YHWH-Prophecy



The next several sections address biblical prophecy. The Bible presents YHWH's *prophets* as ambassadors of the heavenly court (2 Kings 17:13; Jer. 23:21–22), individuals whom God commissioned for two key purposes: to *preach* for God to the people and to *pray* for the people to God.

As chief prayer warriors, the prophets regularly interceded to God on behalf of those who were needy and rebellious. God said that Abraham was such a prophet who would pray for Abimelech's life after he claimed Sarah (Gen. 20:7). Moses is the chief example of a prophetic intercessor, for he "stood in the breach before [God], to turn away his wrath from destroying [Israel]" (Ps. 106:23). Even when YHWH commanded him to not intercede (Ex. 32:9–10), Moses was unrelenting in his prophetic role (32:11–14), and the result was God's mercy (32:14; cf. Num. 14:11–20).²⁶ Similarly, Samuel said that he would sin if he failed to pray for Israel, along with teaching the people God's ways (1 Sam. 12:23). Both Elijah and the prophets of Baal "call upon the name" of their respective gods (1 Kings 18:24, 26, 36–37), and Naaman the Aramean expected Elisha to intercede on his behalf (2 Kings 5:8). Amos pleaded with YHWH two times to forgive Israel and to withhold his punishment against the northern kingdom, and the Lord relented (Amos 7:1–6). God expected the true prophets who bore his word to pray for his people's needs: "If they are prophets, and if the word of the LORD is with them, then let them intercede with the LORD of hosts" (Jer. 27:18). As with Moses, the Lord charged Jeremiah to act opposite of his prophetic role (7:16; cf. 11:14; 14:11–12). Nevertheless, the prophet did pray, and he later implored God to protect him in return for his having done so (18:20). YHWH told Ezekiel that he was seeking a man to "build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it" (Ezek. 22:30), but none could be found.

26. Ironically, YHWH's command, "Let me alone, that I may destroy them" (Deut. 9:14; cf. Ex. 32:10), was actually the means that God used to call the prophet to pray. God gave instruction that would have been sin for Moses to obey, since prophets were supposed to stand in the breach on behalf of God's people. In the Deuteronomy recounting, Moses stresses how Israel's sin was a serious offense against God (Deut. 9:14, 16, 18). Nevertheless, God asks the prophet to do what he himself would promise never to do (4:30–31; 31:6). That Deuteronomy 9:14 uses the verb "leave alone" (Hiphil of **רָפָה**) instead of "cause rest" (Hiphil of **נָחַם**) as found in Exodus 32:10 suggests that Moses in Deuteronomy is intentionally echoing the divine promise in Deuteronomy 4:31 ("He will not leave you [Hiphil of **רָפָה**] or destroy you") and highlighting that he understood YHWH's intent in calling him to get out of the way to be that he actually wanted him to intercede as the means for preserving his people.

Along with kneeling as intercessors, the prophets were mouthpieces, God's preachers, who authoritatively presented the revelation of God to his people. Sometimes they did this by *foretelling* future realities, but more often, it was through *forthtelling* God's words in order to direct human action in the present and to reorient their audiences to reality from YHWH's perspective (2 Kings 17:13; 2 Chron. 36:15–16; Isa. 44:26; Jer. 23:21–22; Hos. 12:9–10; Hag. 1:13; Zech. 7:11–12; Mal. 3:1). At times the divine word came to a prophet through a dream or vision (e.g., Num. 12:6–7; Isa. 6:1–13; Jer. 31:26; Zech. 2:1; Amos 8:1–3), but normally we are not told the mode of inspiration. Sometimes we hear of the Holy Spirit's involvement in inspiration (e.g., 1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 1 Kings 22:24; Neh. 9:30; Ezek. 11:5; Joel 2:28–29; Mic. 3:8; Zech. 7:12), and oracles are frequently preceded with the formulaic expression: "The word of the LORD came to me, saying . . ." (e.g., 2 Sam. 7:4; 1 Kings 21:28; Jer. 1:2; Ezek. 36:16; Hag. 1:3; Zech. 4:8). The divine revelations were usually spoken as sermons, but at times they were framed as parables or allegories (e.g., 2 Sam. 12:1–7; Isa. 5:1–7; Ezek. 16, 23). Other times the prophets dramatically performed their oracles, symbolically working out God's message (e.g., 1 Sam. 15:27–28; 1 Kings 11:29–37; 2 Kings 13:14–20; Jer. 13:1–11; Ezek. 4).

With reference to content, some oracles provided a divine answer to human questions (e.g., Gen. 15:2–5; 2 Sam. 2:1; Hab. 1–2), but most were divinely initiated responses to Israel's covenant fidelity (or lack of it) at a particular time in history. That is, as covenant enforcers, the prophets confronted Israel's sin, called the people back to their commitment to YHWH, and reminded them of the covenant curses and blessings, the promises of death and life, that YHWH had sworn to honor (Lev. 26; Deut. 4:25–31; 28; 30:1–10). The prophets pronounced oracles of warning or imminent punishment against individuals (e.g., 1 Sam. 13:13–14; 1 Kings 11:11–13) and nations (e.g., Isa. 17; Jer. 8:4–12; Ezek. 15; Amos 4:1–3; Mic. 3:7–12) that failed to live loyally in the covenant or to treat God and his people with respect. They also declared salvation and restoration oracles that predicted a day when God would renew his relationship with his people (e.g., Isa. 10:5–12:6; Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:16–32; Amos 9:13–15; Zech. 8:1–8).

Both Scripture (e.g., Num. 22–24; 1 Kings 18:20–40) and numerous extrabiblical texts uncovered throughout the ancient world tell us that many pagans were speaking oracles and that words from the gods were not restricted to biblical prophecy. Like YHWH, these pagan false deities demanded homage and declared judgments. They warned of danger and offered assurance in the face of peril. They foretold national destruction and promised kingdom renewal. But YHWH's prophecy was nevertheless distinct in at least three ways:

1. Among the gods of the ancient world, YHWH alone spoke in order to establish, maintain, and enforce a covenant relationship with a people.

As Moses testifies in Deuteronomy 4:7–8, "For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?" True prophecy promotes sustained loyalty to YHWH alone, exposing iniquity and calling for repentance that leads to blessing (Deut. 13:2–3; Lam. 2:14).

2. Whereas many pagan oracles were ambiguous as to their intent and fulfillment, YHWH’s charges and predictions were intentionally clear and accurate.

Moses asserts in Deuteronomy 18:22, “When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken” (cf. 1 Kings 22:28; Isa. 44:7–8; Jer. 28:8–9; Lam. 2:14; Ezek. 33:33). All of YHWH’s predictions come true.

3. YHWH’s prophecy includes no sign of pagan practices and finds its confirmation in God’s Word alone.

Isaiah 8:19–20 declares: “And when they say to you, ‘Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,’ should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.” In YHWH-oracles a staunch monotheism confronts polytheistic idolatry. “You shall have no other gods before me” (Deut. 5:7; cf. vv. 8–10; 6:4–5; Ps. 115; Isa. 40:18–31). YHWH is a jealous God who demands total allegiance. His voice will be heard, and his Word must be heeded.

The Categories of Prophetic Speech



An *oracle* is any divine pronouncement through a prophet that directs human action in the present or foretells future events. Prophetic oracles in Scripture are usually made up of one or more of the following speech types: *indictment*, *instruction*, *warning/punishment*, and *hope/salvation*.

1. Indictment	Statement of the offense <i>(Specification of covenant stipulations violated)</i>
2. Instruction	Clarification of the expected response <i>(Call to heed covenant stipulations)</i>
3. Warning/Punishment	Declaration of the punishment to be carried out <i>(Warning or promise of covenant curse)</i>
4. Hope/Salvation	Affirmation of future hope or deliverance <i>(Promise of covenant-restoration blessings)</i>

Fig. 1.5. Categories of Prophetic Speech

1. Indictment

A chief role of the prophet was to confront the covenantal violations of God's people. "I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin" (Mic. 3:8 ; cf. Isa. 58:1). Often, the prophets identified the people's specific covenant violations. Micah, for example, declared: "Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity. Its heads give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money; yet they lean on the LORD and say, 'Is not the LORD in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us'" (3:9–11). Similarly, Zephaniah proclaimed, "Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled, the oppressing city! She listens to no voice; she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the LORD; she does not draw near to her God. Her officials within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves that leave nothing till the morning. Her prophets are fickle, treacherous men; her priests profane what is holy; they do violence to the law" (Zeph. 3:1–4).

2. Instruction

Instruction appears when the prophet guides the people in the way they should go, often recalling Moses' specific commands in the Law: "The LORD warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, 'Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the Law that I commanded your fathers'" (2 Kings 17:13). Thus, Micah wrote, "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic. 6:8). And Zephaniah pleaded, "Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the LORD" (Zeph. 2:3).

3. Warning/Punishment

When it comes to declarations of punishment and salvation, it is very important to recognize the close tie between Moses and the later prophets such as Isaiah, Obadiah, and Haggai. When the Latter Prophets spoke words of warning and words of hope, they were directly building on the covenant curses and restoration blessings that Moses spoke in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27–32. A close look at these texts reveals at least ten original blessings, twenty-seven different curses, and ten restoration blessings that would be enjoyed after the curse was overcome. Figure 1.6 gives an overview of all of these.

Blessings	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. YHWH's presence / favor / loyalty (Lev. 26:11–12) 2. Confirmation of the covenant (Lev. 26:9) 3. Be a holy people to YHWH (Deut. 28:9) 4. Rains in season (Lev. 26:4; Deut. 28:12) 5. Abounding prosperity and productivity: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. General (Deut. 28:12); b. Fruit of the womb (Lev. 26:9; Deut. 28:4, 11); c. Fruit of the livestock (Deut. 28:4, 11); d. Fruit of the ground (Lev. 26:4–5, 10; Deut. 28:4, 8, 11) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. General and unspecified (Deut. 28:2, 6, 8, 12–13) 7. Peace and security in the land with no fear: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. General (Lev. 26:5–6); b. From harmful animals (Lev. 26:6); c. From enemies (Lev. 26:6) 8. Victory over enemies (Lev. 26:7–8; Deut. 28:7) 9. Freedom from slavery (Lev. 26:13) 10. Global influence and witness (Deut. 28:1, 10, 12)
Curses	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anger and rejection from YHWH (Lev. 26:17, 24, 28, 41; Deut. 4:24–25; 29:20, 24, 27–28; 31:17–18, 29; 32:16, 19–22, 30) 2. Rejection and destruction of the cult (Lev. 26:31) 3. War and its ravages: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. General (Lev. 26:17, 25, 33, 37; Deut. 28:25, 49, 52; 32:23–24, 30, 41–42); b. Siege (Lev. 26:25–26, 29; Deut. 28:52–53, 55, 57) 4. Fear, terror, and horror (Lev. 26:16–17, 36–37; Deut. 28:66–67; 32:25) 5. Occupation and oppression by enemies and aliens (Lev. 26:16–17, 32; Deut. 28:31, 33, 43–44, 48, 68; 32:21) 6. Agricultural disaster and nonproductivity: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. General (Lev. 26:20; Deut. 28:17–18, 22, 40; 29:23); b. Drought (Lev. 26:19; Deut. 28:22–24); c. Crop pests (Deut. 28:38–42) 7. Starvation / famine (Lev. 26:26, 29, 45; Deut. 28:53–56; 32:24) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Illness, pestilence, and contamination (Lev. 26:16; Deut. 28:21–22, 27–28, 35, 59–61; 29:22; 32:24, 39) 9. Desolation: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Of holy places (Lev. 26:31); b. Of cities and towns (Lev. 26:31, 33); c. Of the land (Lev. 26:32–35, 43; Deut. 28:51; 29:23) 10. Destruction by fire (Deut. 28:24; 32:22) 11. Harm from wild animals (Lev. 26:22; Deut. 32:24) 12. Decimation and infertility: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Of family (Lev. 26:22; Deut. 28:18, 59); b. Of cattle (Lev. 26:22; Deut. 28:18, 51); c. Of population generally (Lev. 26:22, 36; Deut. 4:27; 28:62; 32:36) 13. Exile and captivity: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Of the people (Lev. 26:33–34, 36, 38–39, 41, 44; Deut. 4:27; 28:36–37, 41, 63–64, 68; 29:28; 30:4; 32:26); b. Of the king (Deut. 28:36)

Fig. 1.6. Mosaic Covenant Blessings, Curses, and Restoration Blessings

Curses	
14. Forced idolatry in exile (Deut. 4:28; 28:36, 64) 15. Futility (Lev. 26:16, 20; Deut. 28:20, 29–31, 33, 38–41) 16. Dishonor and degradation (Lev. 26:19; Deut. 28:20, 25, 37, 43–44, 68) 17. Loss of possessions and impoverishment (Deut. 28:31) 18. Loss of family (Deut. 28:30, 32, 41; 32:25) 19. Helplessness and stumbling (Lev. 26:36–37; Deut. 28:29, 32; 32:35–36; 38–39) 20. Psychological afflictions (Deut. 28:20, 28, 34, 65–67) 21. Lack of peace and rest (Deut. 28:65)	22. Denial of burial (Deut. 28:26) 23. Becoming like the cities of the plain (Deut. 29:23) 24. Death and destruction (Lev. 26:36, 39; Deut. 4:26; 28:20–22, 44, 48, 51, 61; 29:20; 30:15, 18–19; 31:17; 32:25–26, 35, 39, 42) 25. General and unspecified (Deut. 4:30; 28:20, 24, 45, 59, 61, 63; 29:19, 21–22; 31:17, 21, 29; 32:23, 35) 26. General punishment, curse, and vengeance (Lev. 26:41, 43; Deut. 28:16, 20–21, 27; 30:19; 32:35, 41, 43) 27. Multiple punishments (Lev. 26:18, 21, 24, 28)
Restoration Blessings	
1. Renewal of YHWH’s presence, favor, and loyalty (Lev. 26:42, 45; Deut. 4:29, 31; 30:3, 9) 2. Renewal of the covenant (Lev. 26:42, 44–45; Deut. 4:31) 3. Restoration of true worship and ability to be faithful (Deut. 4:30; 30:6, 8) 4. Population increase (Deut. 30:5, 9) 5. Agricultural bounty (Lev. 26:42; Deut. 30:9)	6. Restoration of general prosperity, well-being, and wealth (Deut. 30:3, 5, 9; 32:39) 7. Return from exile and repossession of the land (Deut. 30:3–5) 8. Reunification (Deut. 30:3–4) 9. Power over enemies and aliens (Deut. 30:7) 10. Freedom and restoration from death and destruction (Lev. 26:44; Deut. 30:6; 32:39)
<p>All references are from Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 4; 28–32. No single prophetic book, except perhaps Isaiah, mentions all categories. The lists of “Curses” and “Restoration Blessings” are adapted from pp. 1259–60 in “Malachi” by Douglas Stuart in <i>The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary</i>, edited by Thomas Edward McComiskey, copyright ©1998 by Thomas Edward McComiskey. Used by permission of Baker. www.bakerpublishinggroup.com.</p>	

Fig. 1.6. Mosaic Covenant Blessings, Curses, and Restoration Blessings (cont.)

With respect to oracles of punishment, Daniel prays, “All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him” (Dan. 9:11). Prophetic oracles of warning/punishment are words of warning or of imminent punishment against those who have failed to live loyally to the covenant or who have failed to treat God and his people with respect—whether individuals (e.g., 1 Sam. 13:13–14; 1 Kings 11:11–13) or nations (e.g., Isa. 17; Jer. 8:4–12; Ezek. 15; Amos 4:1–3; Mic. 3:7–12). These oracles specify the

outworking of the covenant curses detailed in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 4, 27–28. One example comes in Ezekiel 21:14–17:

As for you, son of man, prophesy. Clap your hands and let the sword come down twice, yes, three times, the sword for those to be slain. It is the sword for the great slaughter, which surrounds them, that their hearts may melt, and many stumble. At all their gates I have given the glittering sword. Ah, it is made like lightning; it is taken up for slaughter. Cut sharply to the right; set yourself to the left, wherever your face is directed. I also will clap my hands, and I will satisfy my fury; I the LORD have spoken.

Echoed here is the Mosaic curse of exile and captivity, listed as curse #13 in figure 1.6. As YHWH warned through Moses: “And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword after you, and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste” (Lev. 26:33).

4. Hope/Salvation

Statements of hope/salvation unpack the restoration blessings that YHWH promises in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 4, 30, along with the more specific dynastic promises to David (2 Sam. 7:12–16). The words of comfort predict a day when God, after punishing his people with exile and death, would renew his relationship with his people (e.g., Isa. 10:5–12:6; Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:16–32; Amos 9:13–15). Consider, for example, Zechariah 8:2–3, 7–8:

Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath. Thus says the LORD: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the holy mountain. . . . Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.

In the backdrop here are a number of Mosaic restoration blessings listed in figure 1.6: #1, renewal of YHWH’s presence, favor, and loyalty; #2, renewal of the covenant; #7, return from exile and repossession of the land. The Lord first proclaimed these promises through Moses, and now he is reasserting their coming fulfillment through his postexilic prophet.

As you work your way through the oracles in books such as Deuteronomy and the Latter Prophets, consider what kind of prophetic speech you are reading. If you are in one of the Latter Prophets and read pronouncements of indictment or instruction, consider which if any of Moses’ commands may be on the mind of the preacher. If you read declarations of punishment or salvation, look back at Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 4, 27–30 to consider which of the blessings, curses, or restoration blessings the

prophet is anticipating. Also, always keep in mind the Davidic covenant promises that made more specific the kingdom hopes of a royal deliverer and new covenant Mediator that Moses initially proclaimed (e.g., Gen. 3:15; 22:17b–18; 49:8–10; Num. 24:17–19; Deut. 18:15–18 with 34:10–12). God’s prophets were covenant enforcers, and we have to read their words in light of the Mosaic and Davidic covenants, among others. They had their Bibles open when they were preaching, and so should we.

Law as Covenant Stipulation



Before laying out some principles for interpreting Old Testament prophecy, I want to detail further the specific shape of biblical law, which controlled the context for prophetic preaching. God gave his law in the framework of covenant relationship, with the various statutes and judgments supplying the stipulations of the covenant. I noted how the classical prophets such as Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Malachi were covenant enforcers, speaking with their Bibles open to Moses’ words. Moses himself was the greatest of all Old Testament prophets, supplying both the content and pattern for most Old Testament proclamation.

Moses’ laws come to us in two forms, which scholars have tagged as *apodictic* and *casuistic*. *Apodictic laws* are those that are base principles stated in such a way that there is no qualification or exception. In contrast, *casuistic laws* are always situational, related to specific circumstances. Casuistic laws are often applications of apodictic laws.

Apodictic	Casuistic
<p><u>Ex. 20:3.</u> You shall have no other gods before me.</p> <p><u>Ex. 20:16.</u> You shall never bear false witness against your neighbor.</p>	<p><u>Ex. 21:28.</u> If a bull gores a man or a woman to death, the bull must be stoned to death, and its meat must not be eaten. But the owner of the bull will not be held responsible.</p> <p><u>Ex. 22:26–27.</u> If you take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.</p>
Unconditional and imperative, usually beginning with a volitional verb	Conditional and declarative, usually beginning with “if” or “when”
Second person	Usually third person
General: without qualification or exception	Specific: based on actual situations, often with motive or exception clauses
Often in negative form	Usually in positive form
<p>Adapted from Daniel I. Block, “Reading the Decalogue from Right to Left: The Ten Principles of Covenant Relationship in the Hebrew Bible,” in <i>How I Love Your Torah, O LORD! Studies in the Book of Deuteronomy</i> (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 31.</p>	

Fig. 1.7. Formal Distinctions in Old Testament Law

Along with identifying these formal distinctions, it is helpful to recognize the different types of laws based on their variations in content. Figure 1.8 provides an overview of five different types of laws found in the Old Testament: *criminal*, *civil*, *family*, *cultic/ceremonial*, and *compassion*.

Criminal Laws
Laws governing crimes or offenses that put the welfare of the whole community at risk; the offended party is the state or national community, and therefore the punishment is on behalf of the whole community in the name of the highest state authority, which in Israel meant YHWH.
<p>Kidnapping (Ex. 21:16; Deut. 24:7)</p> <p>Sustained insubordination to parents (Ex. 21:15, 17; Deut. 21:18–21)</p> <p>Homicide/premeditated or avoidable murder (Ex. 21:14; Num. 35:16–21, 30–31; Deut. 19:11–13)</p> <p>Religious malpractice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Sabbath-breaking (Ex. 31:14–15; 35:2; cf. Num. 15:32–36) b. False prophecy (Deut. 13:1–5; 18:20) c. Idolatry (Ex. 22:20; Lev. 19:4; Deut. 13:1–18; 17:2–7) d. Child sacrifice (Lev. 20:1–5) e. Witchcraft (Ex. 22:18; Lev. 19:26, 31; 20:27) f. Blasphemy (Lev. 24:14–23) <p>Sexual offenses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Adultery when married or engaged (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22–24; cf. Gen. 38:24) b. Concealed premarital unchastity (Deut. 22:20–21) c. Rape of an engaged girl (Deut. 22:25) d. Prostitution of a priest’s daughter (Lev. 21:9) e. Incest (Lev. 20:11–12, 14) f. Homosexuality (Lev. 20:13) g. Bestiality (Ex. 22:19; Lev. 20:15–16) <p>False witness in a capital case (Deut. 19:16–21)</p> <p>Note: Nearly all the commands and prohibitions in the Decalogue are considered criminal offenses.</p>
Civil Laws
Laws governing private disputes between citizens or organizations in which the public authorities are appealed to for judgment or called on to intervene; the offended party is not the state or national community.
<p>Non-premeditated killing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Accidental death (Ex. 21:13; Num. 35:9–15; Deut. 19:1–13) b. Death due to self-defense (Ex. 22:2–3)

Fig. 1.8. Types of Old Testament Laws by Content

Civil Laws
<p>Assault:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Human against human (Ex. 21:18–19, 22) b. Animal against human (Ex. 21:28–32) c. Animal against animal (Ex. 21:33–36) <p>Breaches of trust:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Theft (Ex. 22:1–4, 7–9, 12; Lev. 19:11, 13) b. Destruction of property (Ex. 22:5–6, 14) <p>Falsehood as a witness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. In noncapital case (Ex. 23:1–3) b. In commerce/trade (Lev. 19:35–36) <p>Limited family issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Premarital unchastity between consenting adults, whether real (Ex. 22:16–17; Lev. 19:20–22; Deut. 22:28–29) or potential (Deut. 22:13–21) b. Postdivorce situations (Deut. 24:1–3) c. The mistreatment of slaves (Ex. 21:20–21, 26–27) d. The handling of runaway slaves (Deut. 23:15–16) e. Failure to accept levirate marriage duties (Deut. 25:7–10)
Family Laws
<p>Noncivil, domestic laws governing the Israelite household.</p> <p>Levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5–6)</p> <p>Inheritance (Deut. 21:15–16)</p> <p>Jubilee and the redemption of land and persons (Lev. 25)</p> <p>Family discipleship (Deut. 6:6–9, 20–25; 11:18–21)</p> <p>Respect of and obedience to parents (Ex. 20:12; Lev. 19:3; Deut. 5:16)</p> <p>Turning a daughter into a prostitute (Lev. 19:29)</p> <p>Slavery, including limits of service, inheritance, and protection (Ex. 21:2–11; Deut. 15:1–23)</p> <p>Maintaining gender distinctions (Deut. 22:5)</p>

Fig. 1.8. Types of Old Testament Laws by Content (cont.)

Cultic/Ceremonial Laws
Laws governing the visible forms and rituals of Israel's religious life.
<p>Sacrifice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Altar and sacrifices (Ex. 20:24–26) b. Offering of firstfruits (Ex. 22:29–30; 23:19) c. Sacrifices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General guidelines (Ex. 23:18; 29:38–46; Lev. 1–7; 19:5–8) • Day of Atonement (Lev. 16) • Location (Lev. 17:1–9; Deut. 12) <p>Sacred calendar:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Weekly Sabbaths (Ex. 20:8–11; 23:12; 31:12–17; 35:1–3; Lev. 19:3, 30; Deut. 5:12–15) b. Sabbatical year (Ex. 23:10–11; Lev. 25:3–7; Deut. 15:1–6) c. Feasts and sacred days (Ex. 23:14–19; 34:22–23; Lev. 23:9–22; Deut. 16:1–17) d. Jubilee (Lev. 25:8–55) <p>Sacred symbolism and distinction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Tabernacle (Ex. 25–30) b. Priesthood: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Garments (Ex. 28) • Consecration (Ex. 29:1–37; Lev. 8) • Administration of sacrifices (Ex. 29:38–46; Lev. 6–7) c. Ritual purity (clean/unclean): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food laws (Lev. 11:2–47; 20:24–26; Deut. 14:4–20) and the eating of blood (Lev. 17:10–16; 19:26) • Childbirth (Lev. 12) • Leprosy (Lev. 13–14) • Bodily discharges (Lev. 15) d. Distinction from the pagan nations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interbreeding/mixing of cattle, seeds, garments (Lev. 19:19; Deut. 22:9–11) • Trimming of sideburns, cutting of body, tattoos (Lev. 19:27–28; Deut. 14:1)

Fig. 1.8. Types of Old Testament Laws by Content (cont.)

Compassion Laws
<p>“Laws” dealing with charity, justice, and mercy toward others. These are not exactly the kinds of laws that can be enforced in court, but God knows the heart.</p>
<p>Protection and care of others:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The sojourner (Ex. 22:21; 23:9; Lev. 19:9–10, 33–34; Deut. 14:28–29; 24:19–22) b. The widow and orphan (Ex. 22:22–24; Deut. 14:28–29; 24:19–22) c. The poor (Ex. 22:25–27; 23:6; Lev. 19:9–10; Deut. 15:7–11; 24:10–13, 19–22) d. One’s neighbor (Deut. 19:13, 16–18) e. The disabled (Lev. 19:14; Deut. 27:18) f. The Levite (Deut. 14:28–29) g. The released slave (Deut. 15:12–15) h. The hired servant (Deut. 24:14–15) <p>Justice and impartiality (Ex. 23:7–8; Lev. 19:15; Deut. 24:17–18; 27:19, 25)</p> <p>Honor of the elderly (Lev. 19:32)</p> <p>Return of an enemy or brother’s lost goods (Ex. 22:4; Deut. 22:1–3)</p> <p>Help of an enemy or brother in need (Ex. 23:5; Deut. 22:4)</p> <p>Excusal from war:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. For a new homeowner (Deut. 20:5) b. For a new business owner (Deut. 20:6) c. For a newly married man (Deut. 20:7; 24:5) <p>Marriage to foreign widows of war (Deut. 20:10–14)</p> <p>Preservation of means for food for future generations (Deut. 20:6–7; 25:4)</p> <p>Building safe homes (Deut. 20:8)</p> <p>Respect for others’ means of sustenance (Deut. 23:24–25; 24:6)</p>
<p>Prepared by both Jason S. DeRouchie and Kenneth J. Turner. Originally published in DeRouchie, ed., <i>What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About</i>, 466–67. Used by permission. The examples are only illustrative. The five main categories are taken from Christopher J. H. Wright, <i>Old Testament Ethics for the People of God</i> (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 288–301, which he adapted from Anthony Phillips, <i>Ancient Israel’s Criminal Law: A New Approach to the Decalogue</i> (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 2, 13.</p>

Fig. 1.8. Types of Old Testament Laws by Content (cont.)

As you read through books such as Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, keep your eyes open to the different forms and types of laws, and as you work through the Old Testament’s narratives, prophecies, and wisdom sayings, consider how they relate to Moses’ original covenantal instruction. We’ll consider how Christians are to relate to old covenant laws in chapter 12, which focuses on practical theology.

Guidelines for Interpreting Old Testament Prophecy



As you work your way through biblical prophecy, keep in mind the following five principles.²⁷

1. Guard against interpretive fallacies. So many people approach Old Testament prophecy in the wrong way.

- a. *Ancient-Modern Nation Confusion*: Attempting to link Old Testament prophecy with particular current political regimes. Not only is the modern, secular state of Israel different from the Israel of the Bible, the linking of unspecified Old Testament prophecies with particular contemporary events or peoples is extremely difficult, if not impossible. Even when the prophets foretell future events, they are still preaching sermons, and their purpose is to awaken fresh levels of covenant loyalty in the present in the light of God's supremacy over all. Even if we can't yet identify all images exactly, the prophets are clear enough in telling us that YHWH is in charge of history and will make all things right.
- b. *Genre Confusion*: Assuming that the interpretational rules for one genre apply to another. Because literature varies so much, the interpreter must be guided by the dual authors' intent, distinguishing literal statements from figures of speech, symbolism, and metaphor, all of which are frequent in the Prophets.
- c. *Spiritualizing*: Removing a statement from the historical truth to which it speaks in order to make a "deeper" or "spiritual" application that is absent from the context.
- d. *Personalizing*: Assuming that a text could apply to you or your group in a way that it does not apply to anyone else.
- e. *Allegorizing*: Assuming that components of a passage have meaning only as symbols of Christian truths. Usually this approach does not consider at all the intent of the biblical author.
- f. *Universalizing*: Treating something unique or uncommon as though it applied to everyone equally.
- g. *Moralizing*: Assuming that principles for living can be derived from every biblical passage. Some texts tell us not how to live but whom we should live for.

27. The first four were adapted from a course handout from Douglas Stuart, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 1999.

- h. *Exemplarizing*: Assuming that because the Bible records an action, it is always an example for us to follow. For example, we would be wrong to conclude from the fact that David committed sexual immorality with Bathsheba that we are justified in doing the same.
- i. *Superficial Christologizing or Typologizing*: Asserting that some person, event, or institution points to Christ without exegetical or theological warrant. We want to find Christ, but only where God intends him to be found.

2. Think in terms of oracles.

Nearly all prophetic teaching is in the form of oracles, self-contained verbal revelations from God, often beginning, “Thus says the LORD.” The prophets appear to have spoken or sung the oracles publicly in order to call people to loyalty or to explain what God was doing in history and why.

We must carefully identify the beginning and end of an oracle and be sure that we understand its characteristic terminology, structure, and speech types. We must patiently analyze the oracle’s historical, literary, and biblical context, grasping its place in history, the book, and the canon. We must also diligently scrutinize its form, structure and flow, and important words.

Most prophetic oracles fall between strict prose and poetry, and all employ multiple figures of speech. Some are visionary, and therefore we must carefully identify their symbolism for modern audiences unused to such imagery. We must faithfully interpret all oracles within the biblical-theological matrix of all of Scripture. People need to know the “big picture” if they are to orient their lives properly. They need to hear us teach the Prophets accurately.

3. Pay attention to history.

All fifteen Old Testament classical prophets preached during a monumental 340-year period (770–433 B.C.) during which Israel and Judah were reduced from independent nations to a single, pitiful, remnant state (Judah), one tiny district in the huge Persian Empire. Why? It was because their long history of disobedience to God’s Mosaic covenant required the unleashing of its curses.

This was an era of dramatic change, and God’s prophets clarified for Israel and the world why history was playing out the way it was and how this history fit within God’s overall kingdom-building plan culminating in Christ. Were God’s ancient promises of Israel’s greatness void? Was there any hope for the promised future kingdom? Would the era of curse be supplanted by restoration blessing? Prophetic preaching is significantly about historical developments, and no interpretation of its message that ignores historical context can hope to be accurate.

Figure 1.9 gives an overview of the main world powers and the three main periods for the classical prophets. Note how the arrangement of the Prophets in the Bible is not chronological. This suggests that theology rather than chronology played the decisive factor in ordering the biblical Prophets.

Power & Prophetic Period	Israel	Judah	Canonical Order
Assyria (870–626 b.c.) ————— <i>8th–early 7th century</i>	Jonah (ca. 770) Amos (ca. 760) Hosea (ca. 760–730)	Isaiah (ca. 740–700) Micah (ca. 737–690) Nahum (ca. 650)	Jeremiah Ezekiel Isaiah The Twelve Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi
Babylon (626–539 b.c.) ————— <i>Late 7th–early 6th century</i>		Habakkuk (ca. 630) Jeremiah (ca. 627–580) Zephaniah (ca. 622) Joel (ca. 600?) Obadiah (ca. 586?) Ezekiel (ca. 593–570) <i>[in Babylon]</i>	
Persia (539–323 b.c.) ————— <i>Late 6th–5th century</i>		Haggai (ca. 520) Zechariah (ca. 520–518) Malachi (ca. 433)	
The canonical order is taken from Baba Bathra 14b (see “Putting Genre within Its Biblical Context” above). Most of the dates for the prophets are taken from John H. Walton, <i>Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament</i> , 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 52.			

Fig. 1.9. The Chronology of the Classical Prophets

4. Remember the covenants and the canon.

YHWH’s prophets were enforcers and ambassadors of the various covenants that God had made with those on earth. They also predicted the coming new covenant, which would fulfill in different ways all previous divine-human covenants.

Without question, the Mosaic covenant bore the greatest influence on prophetic preaching (Ex. 19–Deut. 33). It guided the prophets’ indictments and instructions toward Israel and also supplied a framework for the blessings, curses, and restoration blessings they pronounced (see Lev. 26; Deut. 4, 27–32).

The first era of temporary blessing was prosperous life in the Promised Land, which culminated in the reigns of David and Solomon. Then, as a result of covenant-breaking, YHWH divided the monarchy and brought the curse of foreign oppression and exile, first against the northern kingdom of Israel and then against the southern kingdom of Judah. Reflecting on the Assyrian conquest of Samaria and the north in

723 B.C., the author of Kings asserted, “This occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God . . . They would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God. They despised his statutes and his covenant that he made with their fathers and the warnings that he gave them” (2 Kings 17:7, 14–15). The devastation of the north was then followed by Babylon’s progressive oppression and exile of the southern kingdom of Judah (605, 597, 586 B.C.), climaxing in the destruction of Jerusalem with its temple in 586 B.C.

While YHWH promised through Moses this future desolation (Deut. 4:25–28; 31:16–17, 26–29), curse would not be his final word: “When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice. For the LORD your God is a merciful God” (4:30–31). The era of restoration blessing is the new creational age of the new covenant inaugurated in Christ’s first coming. God would bring it about by *his* mercy alone and in order to restore honor to *his* name: “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came” (Ezek. 36:22).

YHWH’s vow to supply David with an eternal kingdom and throne (2 Sam. 7:12–16) gives focus to the Mosaic restoration promises by identifying that the promised seed of the woman and of Abraham (Gen. 3:15; 22:17b–18) would not only be in the line of Judah (Gen. 49:8–10) but also be in the line of David. The Major and Minor Prophets regularly build on these promises, fusing the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenant hopes into one (e.g., Isa. 9:7; 55:3; Jer. 23:5; 30:9; Ezek. 34:23; 37:24–25; Hos. 3:5; Amos 9:11; Zech. 13:1).

Because the Mosaic and new covenants operate as stage 1 and stage 2 of the Abrahamic covenant (see “An Example of Text Grammar—Genesis 12:1–3” in chapter 5 and the discussion of “Covenant” under “The Historical Context of Exodus 19:4–6” in chapter 8), the Prophets also put hope in the promises that God had made to the patriarchs (e.g., Isa. 29:22; 41:8; 51:2; Jer. 33:25–26; Mic. 7:20). These included both the assertion that “him who dishonors you I will curse” and the promise that “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). Such statements, along with the fact that all the world stands as part of the Adamic-Noahic covenants (see Gen. 9:9–11; Isa. 24:4–6; Zech. 11:10; cf. Isa. 43:27; Hos. 6:7), supply the backdrop for the numerous oracles toward the foreign nations (e.g., Isa. 13–23; Jer. 46–51; Ezek. 25–32; Obad. 1–21; Zeph. 2:5–15). In these, YHWH, the covenant Lord of creation, declares that he will both punish and reconcile on a global scale (Zeph. 3:8–10).

In anticipating the days of worldwide kingdom restoration, the Prophets in part predict the present age of the church, our own “last days,” initiated by Christ’s death and resurrection (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:1–2). They also anticipate a consummated fulfillment in the age to come in which the blessings are not only greater than those of the first era but eternal for those who know God’s redemption (Eph. 1:3, 13–14; 1 Peter 1:3–5) (see “Old Testament Promises and the Christian” in chapter 12).

The prophets were *not* first and foremost innovators; they were reminders and

enforcers. They preached from their Scriptures, and we will understand them properly only by reading their books in this light.

We must be ever questioning how their message fits within the whole of the Christian canon. The Major and Minor Prophets make up the Latter Prophets, which occur after the Former Prophets. This structure allows Joshua-Kings to tell us *what* happened in the covenant history and Jeremiah-Malachi to describe *why* it happened the way it did. We must also consider the significance of the fact that the arrangement of the Latter Prophets in Scripture appears substantially driven by theological rather than chronological purposes. For example, even though Jonah is likely the earliest of the first-millennial writing prophets, the book of Jonah is placed fifth in the Book of the Twelve. We should ask, therefore, whether Obadiah's preceding Jonah is to influence our reading of Jonah.²⁸ Furthermore, we should always be asking how later prophetic voices in the Old and New Testaments pick up or relate to the message we are reading. We must read the Prophets within their canonical placement and in light of the Adamic-Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and new covenants.

5. See and savor Christ and the gospel.

The New Testament is clear that the Old Testament prophets looked with anticipation for the days of the promised Messiah. For example, Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad" (John 8:56; cf. Matt. 13:17). Furthermore, the prophets "searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories" (1 Peter 1:10–11).

Following his resurrection, Jesus asserted, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the *prophets* have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and *all the Prophets*, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:25–27). We also read, "He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem'" (24:45–47).

Many other New Testament voices stress that *every prophet* anticipated both Christ's tribulations and the triumph that would follow. In Peter's words, "But what God foretold by the mouth of *all the prophets*, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. . . . Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. . . .' And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days" (Acts 3:18, 22, 24). And again, "to him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (10:43). Later Paul also asserts, "I stand here testifying both to small

28. It is likely that the one who stitched the Twelve together believed that the pride of Edom against Israel that God condemns in Obadiah stood as a mirror of the pride of Jonah against Nineveh. Jonah represents the nation of Israel, and just as YHWH confronted Edom's pride, he will confront Israel's.

and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles” (26:22–23).

The Old Testament prophets anticipated the Messiah’s suffering and the mission it would spark. Because all the prophets point to Jesus, our interpretation of the prophetic books cannot end until we have discerned how each announces the Christ. This does not mean that every passage will point to the Messiah in the same way, but Jesus’ gospel work can and should be magnified from every prophetic text. Only in this way do the Prophets take their place as Christian Scripture. As you read the Prophets, seek to see and savor Christ and the gospel (see the section with a similar title in chapter 12).

Psalms

A Christian Approach to the Psalms



The book of Psalms contains some of the most familiar and well-loved parts of the Bible. By seeing only the initial words of the following verses, many readers can probably recite the entire passages by heart: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Ps. 1:1–2). “O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth” (8:1[H2]).²⁹ “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul” (23:1–3).

Jesus loved the Psalter and often used it to defend his messiahship or to give voice to his pain. For example, in his dialogue with the chief priests and elders, Jesus identified himself as the suffering king of Psalm 118:22–23 when he questioned, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’” (Matt. 21:42). Similarly, when engaging the Pharisees about the predicted Messiah and pushing them on their assertion that the Messiah was *David’s* son, Jesus referred to Psalm 110:1, asking, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls [the Christ] Lord, saying, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet?’” (Matt. 22:43–44). Jesus saw Judas’s betrayal predicted in the Psalter (Ps. 41:9[H10]; John 13:18), and in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus appeared to allude to the words of the troubled king from Psalm 42:5–6[H6–7] (Matt. 26:38). At the cross he cried out,

29. The “H + number” in brackets refers to Hebrew verse numbers that differ from the English.