**Understanding and Interpreting The Prophets**

1. **Identity and function of the prophets**

* Earlier pre-kingdom prophets – Moses, Joshua, Samuel, etc.
* Early kingdom prophets – Gad, Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, etc.
* Mid/late/post kingdom prophets – the Biblical prophets
* Requirement – presence of God’s Spirit, and the reception of God’s words *2 Peter 1:21* (The truth received was molded and expressed in terms of the language and culture of that day and proclaimed to the people)
* Function – God’s spokesman, messengers (How to distinguish true and false prophet. Deut 18:20-22; 13:1-5)
* Delivery – Orally, written (immediately or collected later)

1. **The Message of the prophets**

* Topic variety – social injustice; worship of idols; condemnation of other nations; temple building; etc.
* Common theme – God’s character; call to repent of sin; Messianic prophecy; future kingdom; JUDGMENT / COMFORT
* Divine realities for God’s people – They belong to God, God does not belong to them; God has called them into being for his purposes; Israel reflect God’s character by walking in his ways and keeping covenant with him; Yahweh is not a local Israelite deity, but the sovereign God of the universe
* Role of the nations – (Gen 12:2-3)

1. **The Interpretation of prophecy**

* Difficulties – poetic nature and symbolic language; unawareness of historical background; different theological assumptions especially toward eschatological fulfillment
* Academic preparation – historical (1-2 Kings and 1-2 Chronicles) and language research
* Study pattern:

1. Read the entire book and have a basic understanding of the thrust of the book, who were the audience and what was the issue?
2. Divide the book into topical sections to get an outline. What problems did the prophet preach about? How the shorter arguments fit together to make up the whole book? Which messages relate to the present situation and which refer to the future?

* Proper understanding relating to the Law and the Former Prophets – call God’s people back to their covenant roots, announcing both blessings and curses for covenant loyalty or disloyalty.
* Common structure:

1. Lawsuit (charge – evidence – verdict)
2. woe oracles
3. promise

* Prophecy regarding future events – be aware of the frequent tension between near future and ultimate future. Most do not give all the details of exactly what will happen or when God will accomplish what He has promised. Faith is always needed (trusting God for things unseen and unknown)
* Theological focuses:

1. Sovereignty of God
2. Moral Foundation of Israel
3. Balance of Judgment and comfort
4. Past, present, and future
5. Messianic kingdom