

# The Prophets

## Falls International Baptist Institute

### Class Two: Overview of the Major Prophets

**The last seventeen books of the Old Testament are known as “the Prophets”. The first five of those books are called “the Major Prophets” while the last twelve are known as “the Minor Prophets”.** The Prophetic Books were written during days of apostasy and spiritual darkness in Israel. In Deuteronomy 18:15-22, Moses wrote that God would raise up “*prophets*” to preach the messages of God. And... God did exactly what He said. The word *prophet* in the Hebrew means “*to bubble forth, as from a fountain,*” or, *to utter*. The “prophet” proclaimed the message given to him from God. Therefore a prophet was a spokesman for God: he spoke in God's name and by his authority (Exodus 7:1). He was the mouth by which God spoke to men (Jeremiah 1:9; Isaiah 51:16); therefore, what the prophet said was not of man, but of God. **The time of the Jewish prophets can be divided into two periods. Before the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.** the prophets were primarily spokesmen to the kings. Samuel, Nathan, Elijah and Elisha are examples. **During and after the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.,** the prophets directed their messages to the nation of Israel as a whole and sometimes even to foreign nations. It was also during this time that the prophet’s messages began to be written down and kept. “*The prophets were authoritative and influential teachers because they were direct spokesmen of God. They received their messages directly from God and preached them to the people. Sadly, the prophets were very unpopular in their own time because they spoke against immorality and religious apostasy. By the way, that kind of preaching is unpopular in any timeframe. But it is always sorely needed!*” – Pastor Phil Spencer

Here are some interesting facts about this division of the Old Testament called “the Prophets”;

1. The time span of the Prophetic Books was about 400 years from 800 BC to 400 BC.
2. **There are seventeen books of the Prophets but only sixteen writers: Jeremiah wrote the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations.**
3. **The difference between the Major Prophets and Minor Prophet is the size of the books.**
4. **The Four Major Prophets who wrote five books are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.**
5. Each of the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel are larger than all twelve of the Minor Prophets combined.
6. The Book of Daniel is about the size of the two largest Minor Prophets combined: Hosea and Zechariah.
7. Thirteen of the prophets were associated with the destruction of the Hebrew nation. The Northern Kingdom (known as Israel after the nation split) fell in the period of 734-721 BC. The prophets who prophesied preceding to and during this period of time were Joel, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. The Southern Kingdom (known as Judah after the nation split) fell between 606 and 586 BC. The prophets who prophesied during this period of time were Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah.

8. Three of the prophets were associated with the restoration of the southern kingdom of Judah: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

## THE MAJOR PROPHETS:

### I. ISAIAH

- A. The book of Isaiah is the first of the seventeen books of prophecy and the first of the five Major Prophets.
- B. The author of the book is Isaiah.
- C. Some facts about Isaiah:
1. **The name 'Isaiah' means "Yahweh is salvation".**
  2. **Isaiah was a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah.** In fact, he was ministering to Judah while the Assyrians were conquering the northern kingdom of Israel. Isaiah's ministry included the reign of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. He was a contemporary with Hosea and Micah.
  3. Historical tradition says that Isaiah's persecutors sawed him in half during the reign of Manasseh. Hebrews 11:37 speaks of those who were sawn asunder.
- D. **The Book of Isaiah is like a miniature Bible. It has sixty-six chapters just like the bible has sixty-six books.**
1. The first thirty-nine chapters are filled with condemnation and judgment just like the Old Testament (Law).
  2. The last twenty-seven chapters declare a message of hope just like the New Testament. Isaiah 40 begins just like Matthew with "the voice of one crying in the wilderness". Isaiah 66 ends like Revelation with a message of the New Heaven and the New Earth. Isaiah has been called by some "The Apostle Paul of the Old Testament."
- E. The word "*salvation*" appears in Isaiah twenty-six times, but only seven times in all the other prophets combined. One of the greatest verses in Isaiah is Isaiah 1:18: "*Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*" Isaiah 53 is probably the greatest chapter in the book as well as the greatest Messianic prophecy in the whole Bible.

### II. JEREMIAH

- A. Jeremiah is the twenty-fourth book on the Bible and the second of the Prophets.
- B. The prophet, Jeremiah, authored this book, with the exception of chapter 52.
- C. Some facts about Jeremiah:
1. **Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet.**
  2. His ministry spanned more than forty years from 627 to 580 BC.

3. Jeremiah was from the city of Anathoth which was about two miles south of Jerusalem.
  4. Jeremiah's father was Hilkaiah, the priest.
  5. It is very interesting to note that Jeremiah was called to be a prophet before he was born according to Jeremiah 1:5 *"Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."*
  6. Jeremiah was a persecuted prophet by his own people. He prophesied of the coming judgment of God upon the southern kingdom of Judah by Babylon. In fact, he prophesied about Babylon's conquering Judah so much so, that Babylon is referred to at least 164 times. His countrymen viewed him as being unpatriotic with his allegiance to Babylon. He prophesied specifically that the Babylonian Captivity would last for seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11-14; 29:10). In fact, the prophet Daniel said in Daniel 9:2 *"In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem."*
  7. **Jeremiah dictated his writings to his secretary, Baruch the scribe.** He communicated God's message through parables, sermons, and object lessons.
- D. Jeremiah's message was not just a message of judgment: In Jeremiah 31, God used Jeremiah to prophesy of a New Covenant that God would make for His People, the nation of Israel. Though judgment was falling because of sin, mercy would be extended through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ!
- E. Jeremiah 18-19 are probably the most famous chapters in the book as Jeremiah visits the Potter's House and God uses that to give an object lesson to the nation of Israel.

### III. LAMENTATIONS

- A. **Lamentations is the second book authored by Jeremiah.**
- B. Lamentations means "*laments, tears*". This book was written soon after Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians. On August 15th, 588 BC, the Babylonians burned Jerusalem and the Temple. Lamentations describes the funeral of Jerusalem. God used Babylon as His instrument to chastise His children for their rebellion against Him. But even in the midst of judgement, Jeremiah cries out in Lamentations 3:22-23 *"It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness."*
- C. What is the importance of a book like Lamentations?
  1. Like the book of Job, Lamentations pictures a man of God confused over the results of evil and suffering in the world. However, while Job dealt with unexplained evil, Jeremiah wept for

a tragedy entirely of Jerusalem's making. The people of this once great city experienced the judgment of the holy God, and the results were devastating.

2. The structure of the book highlights the Grace of God. While the first two and last two chapters point to the devastation which was deserved, the book climaxes at the middle chapter which focuses on the goodness of God. He is the LORD of mercy, of faithfulness, of hope and of salvation: At the heart of this book, at the center of this *lament* over the effects of sin in the world, we find a few verses devoted to hope in the Lord (Lamentations 3:22–25). What an inspiration this set of verses are to men suffering the consequences of their own sin and disobedience.
3. **Lamentations reminds us of the importance not only of mourning over our sin but of asking the Lord for His forgiveness when we fail Him.**

#### IV. EZEKIEL

- A. The book of **Ezekiel** is the fourth major prophet. This book was written by the prophet Ezekiel.
- B. Some facts about Ezekiel:
  1. Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, was a priest who was called to be a prophet of God.
  2. **The name Ezekiel means “strengthened by God”.** This prophet needed the strength of God as God sent him to a people who were stubborn and hardhearted according to Ezekiel 3:4-9.
  3. Ezekiel was not sent as a missionary to the people of another country. He was sent as a prophet of God to his own countrymen who were in Babylonian captivity.
  4. **Ezekiel prophesied at the end of Jeremiah's ministry and at the beginning of Daniel's ministry.** Jeremiah was preaching in Jerusalem just before their complete fall while Ezekiel prophesied in Babylon. A part of Ezekiel's work was to remind the generation born during the Babylonian Captivity of 1) The cause of Judah's current destruction. 2) God's coming judgment on the Gentile nations. 3) The people being restored back to Jerusalem. *“The phrase, “They shall know that I am the Lord,” is used nearly 70 times in this book. The Israelites had been sinful and stiff-necked. When other nations did what Israel had done, God destroyed them. However, God did not intend to allow Israel to be destroyed because of His covenant with Abraham. He was punishing them for their sin and at the same time was drawing them back to Himself.”*  
- Pastor Phil Spencer

- C. The greatest chapter in the book of Ezekiel is chapter 37 where Ezekiel has the Vision of the Valley of Dry Bones. Judah was represented in the Valley of Dry Bones. But God promised that He would both Revive and Restore Judah again!!! While in the immediate context, Judah was revived from Babylonian captivity after seventy years, the greater prophetic context is being fulfilled before our eyes. After being in the graveyard of nations for nearly two thousand years, Israel was rebirthed as a nation in 1948, and we are watching as God revives and restores His people!

## V. DANIEL

- A. Daniel is the fifth book of the prophets and the last of the major prophets.
- B. Some Facts about Daniel:
1. Daniel was deported from Jerusalem to Babylon when he was sixteen-years old.
  2. **Daniel is one of two men in the Old Testament of whom not one bad thing is written.** Someone said *“If you can’t live the Jerusalem life in Jerusalem, you’ll never be able to live it in Babylon.”* Daniel lived a blameless life!
  3. Daniel’s life was characterized by faith, prayer, courage, consistency, and a refusal to compromise.
  4. Three times Daniel is mentioned by his 6<sup>th</sup>-century counterpart, Ezekiel, as an example of righteousness. (Ezekiel 9:23; 10:11, 19) Daniel’s life and ministry spanned the entire seventy-year Babylonian captivity.
- C. The Book of Daniel has been called the Apocalypse of the Old Testament.
1. The Book of Daniel records what is known in scripture as “the times of the Gentiles.”
  2. **The Book of Daniel is a parallel to the Book of Revelation.** You cannot understand much of either book without the other. Both books deal with the man of sin, the tribulation period, the second coming and the judgments. It is also interesting to note that the circumstances of both Daniel and the Apostle John are similar in that both books were written while they were in exile and both men saw visions.
- D. The Book of Daniel was written to offer encouragement to the Jewish exiles by revealing God’s sovereign will for Israel after the period of Gentile domination.
- E. This book also records the stories of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fiery furnace as well as Daniel and the Lion’s Den!