



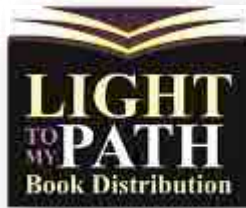
# **God's SPOKESMEN**

A Survey of the  
Prophetic Ministry in the Bible

**F. WAYNE MAC LEOD**

# God's Spokesmen

A Survey of the Prophetic  
Ministry in the Bible



**F. Wayne MacLeod**

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God's Spokesmen

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## Table of Contents

Chapter 1 - Genesis: God Speaks to His People .....	1
Chapter 2 - Genesis: God Speaks Through His People	11
Chapter 3 – Exodus: Moses, God's Spokesman .....	21
Chapter 4 - The Law and Prophecy .....	33
Chapter 5 - Joshua, Judges, and Ruth: The Word of the Lord was Rare .....	49
Chapter 6 - Samuel.....	59
Chapter 7 - Prophecy Under the Reigns of David and Solomon .....	73
Chapter 8 - The Prophets of the Divided Kingdom .....	81
Chapter 9 - Elijah .....	95
Chapter 10 - Elisha .....	105
Chapter 11 - Jonah .....	117
Chapter 12 - Amos.....	127
Chapter 13 - Hosea .....	139
Chapter 14 - Isaiah .....	155
Chapter 15 - Micah .....	185
Chapter 16 - Nahum .....	199
Chapter 17 - Jeremiah .....	209
Chapter 18 - Zephaniah .....	239
Chapter 19 - Habakkuk.....	251
Chapter 20 - Ezekiel .....	259

Chapter 21 - Daniel .....	287
Chapter 22 - Obadiah.....	307
Chapter 23 - Haggai .....	315
Chapter 24 - Zechariah .....	323
Chapter 25 - Joel.....	345
Chapter 26 - Malachi .....	357
Chapter 27 - New Testament Prophecy in the Early Days of Jesus.....	371
Chapter 28 - Old Testament Prophecy in the Life and Ministry of Christ .....	383
Chapter 29 - Jesus as Prophet.....	391
Chapter 30 - Prophecy in the Book of Acts.....	405
Chapter 31 - Paul's Teaching on Prophecy .....	417
Chapter 32 - The Apostle John.....	431
Chapter 33 - False Prophecy.....	443
Chapter 34 - Biblical Arguments Used Against the Prophetic Ministry Today.....	461
Chapter 35 - Prophecy in the Church Today.....	471

## Chapter 1 - Genesis: God Speaks to His People

As we begin this study on the role of Biblical prophecy, it is important that I set some parameters. Prophecy, in its essence, is a revelation from God to His creation about His purpose. This may include the unveiling of future events, but prophecy is just as likely to reveal the will of God for His people in the present time.

All of Scripture fits this description as it unfolds the purpose of God for us today and our hope for the future. In this study, however, I want to focus on how God revealed His heart to individuals and the men and women He used to share that purpose. My goal, in these opening words, is not to define prophecy but to give direction to the study. I hope that as the study unfolds, the definition, purpose, and means of prophecy will become quite evident.

We begin in the first book of the Bible just after the creation of Adam and Eve. There in that Garden, the Lord spoke to the first man and his wife, revealing His purpose to them:

*16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2)*

Notice two details in the words of the Lord, spoken to Adam and Eve.

First, God reveals His present plan for Adam and Eve. He told them that they were to eat of every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God made His purpose clear in these words. He showed Adam and his wife what they could eat and what they could not eat. Were it not for this direct revelation of God, Adam and Eve would never have understood this purpose.

Second, God not only speaks about His present plan for Adam and Eve, but He also tells them what would happen in the future if they did not follow this plan. If they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would die. The words of this prophecy are conditional upon the actions of Adam and Eve. In other words, the truth God was revealing to this couple did not have to come to pass if they chose to walk in obedience. If, however, they rebelled against the purpose of God, then death would follow.

We have, in these words, what I call a conditional prophecy. If certain conditions are met, then the words would come true. In this case, if Adam or Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil then they would die. If they chose not to eat from the tree, then they would continue to live.

This would not be the only time God would speak directly to this first couple. In Genesis 3 we read how Satan sought to discredit the prophetic words of the Lord by tempting Eve to eat from the forbidden tree. Eve yielded to this temptation and gave the fruit of the tree to her husband. Together they committed the first sin. Listen to the response of the Lord God to this act of disobedience:

16 *To the woman he said,  
"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;  
in pain you shall bring forth children.*

*Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,  
but he shall rule over you.”  
17 And to Adam he said,  
“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife  
and have eaten of the tree  
of which I commanded you,  
‘You shall not eat of it,’  
cursed is the ground because of you;  
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;  
18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;  
and you shall eat the plants  
you shall eat bread,  
till you return to the ground,  
for out of it you were taken;  
for you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3)*

That day, the Lord God revealed to Adam and Eve the results of their sin. Pain and suffering were introduced for the first time – Eve would bear children in pain. God also showed Eve that there would be brokenness in her relationship with Adam – “Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.” The earth would be cursed – “cursed is the ground because of you.” Finally, death would come to both the man and the woman – “to dust you shall return.” We see the fulfilment of these prophetic words in our world today.

In Genesis 4 we read how Cain, the son of Adam and Eve, would kill his brother Abel. The Lord appeared to Cain after this murder and spoke to him directly about what he had done:

*8 Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. 9 Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” 10 And the Lord said, “What have you done?*



*The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. 11 And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12 When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."* (Genesis 4)

The Lord revealed to Cain that the ground he worked to gain a livelihood would be cursed for him. He would become a wanderer on the earth making a living wherever he could. The prophetic words God spoke to Cain that day were words of rebuke and judgement. They pronounced his sentence.

So far, we have seen from these prophetic statements of God that prophecy reveals the purpose of God for His people. It also issues warnings of danger when they wander from the path God has laid out for them. Now we see from His words to Cain that prophecy also pronounced the judgement of God on those who wandered from Him and His plan.

As we move on in the book of Genesis, we see that prophecy also gave direction and announced blessings. In Genesis 12, for example, God declared to Abraham that He would form his descendants into a great nation:

*1 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* (Genesis 12)

God told Abram to leave his country to go to a land that He would show him. God spoke directly to Abram revealing the purpose He had for him— "go... to the land that I will show you."

Also, in these words of God to Abram was a great promise. God told him that He would bless him and all nations through him. These prophetic words of God announce great blessing to Abram and his descendants.

God would remind Abram of this prophecy several times in his life (see Genesis 12:1-2; 15:1-6; 17:1-8). The promise is repeated to Abram's son Isaac (Genesis 26:1-5), and his grandson Jacob (Genesis 28:10-15). It was essential to God that this family understand that they were chosen to be His instruments of blessing to the nations. This was revealed to them directly from God. In the case of Jacob, as recorded in Genesis 28, we see that this revelation from God came in the form of a dream.

The revelation of this will of God for Abraham and his family would have placed them under obligation to God. Knowing that God had a purpose for them as a family, would help them to have a clear focus in life. They would be God's people, and as such, they would live for Him and worship Him alone.

When the time approached for Sarah to conceive, God spoke to her and her husband about this.

*10 The Lord said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son."  
And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him  
(Genesis 18)*

Notice how the Lord God announced the time in which Sarah, as an old woman would give birth. When it took place as the Lord told them, they would have the assurance that this was indeed from Him. There was no obligation on the Lord's part to tell Abraham and Sarah when this child would be born. He did so, however, to encourage them and assure them that this was from Him.

When the child Isaac was born, great jealousy arose between Sarah and her servant Hagar, who had given birth to Abraham's son Ishmael. The intensity of this jealousy and bitterness between the two women was such that Abraham sent Hagar and his son Ishmael away. This was a tough decision for Abraham. The Lord, however, spoke directly to him about this matter:

*10 So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac." 11 And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. 12 But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. 13 And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring." 14 So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. (Genesis 21)*

Through these words spoken to Abraham, God promised a future for his son Ishmael and reaffirmed to Abraham that he was right to send him away. God gave encouragement and direction to Abraham through this prophetic word. Abraham was able to send Hagar and her son away, knowing that God would look after them and provide a good future for them.

As Isaac grew up and took a wife, he too would become a father. His wife Rebekah experienced many problems with her pregnancy. This worried Rebekah so much that Isaac asked the Lord about it:

*21 And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren. And the Lord granted his prayer, and*

*Rebekah his wife conceived. 22 The children struggled together within her, and she said, "If it is thus, why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. 23 And the Lord said to her,*

*"Two nations are in your womb,  
and two peoples from within you shall be divided;  
the one shall be stronger than the other,  
the older shall serve the younger." (Genesis 25)*

The Lord told the couple that twins were in Rebekah's womb. These twins represented two nations who would be a war with each other. Through this prophecy, the Lord brought clarity and comfort to Rebekah by revealing what was happening.

The examples of prophecy we have examined so far in the book of Genesis have all been related to God speaking directly to His people. In these examples, we learn some valuable lessons about prophecy and its purpose.

We see first that God spoke directly to Adam and Eve to reveal to them how He wanted them to live. Prophecy in this sense is a revelation of God's purpose and teaches us what God expects of us. There is a teaching element in prophecy.

Second, God warned His people of dangers through prophetic words. He told Adam and Eve that if they disobeyed His commands, they would die. God warned Cain before he killed his brother that "sin was crouching at his door. Its desire is for you" (Genesis 4:7). God revealed these things to Adam, Eve and Cain to keep them from falling into sin and death.

Third, when God's people turn from Him and rebel against His purpose, God spoke prophetically to pronounce His judgement. This was the case for Adam and Eve when God told them that the result of this sin would be suffering,

broken relationships, cursed ground, and death. It was also the case for Cain when God told him that the land he tilled would be cursed and that he would become a wanderer on the earth.

Fourth, in the passages, we have considered we see that God spoke prophetically to announce His blessing. He announced to Abram that He would make him into a great nation. He repeated this promise to Isaac and Jacob.

Fifth, God spoke prophetically in the book of Genesis to give direction to His people. He called Abram out of Ur to travel to an unknown land. He told Abraham that he was to let Ishmael and his mother Hagar go.

Finally, God's prophetic words were used to bring His people assurance under challenging times. When Abraham was troubled about letting Hagar and Ishmael leave, God promised that He would make Ishmael into a great nation. When Rebekah struggled to understand what was going on in her womb, God reassured her that He had a purpose.

So far, we have examined how God spoke directly to various individuals in the book of Genesis. God also spoke indirectly to individuals by giving His message to one person to share with another. In the next chapter, we will see what the book of Genesis has to teach us about how God used people to speak on His behalf.

For Consideration:

What evidence do we have in the book of Genesis that God spoke directly to His people?

What is a conditional prophecy? Give an example of a conditional prophecy.

How does prophecy in the book of Genesis warn God's people of coming danger? Give an example.

How does prophecy in Genesis give direction and comfort to the people of God? Give an example.

What was the purpose for God to speak directly to His people in the book of Genesis?

For Prayer:

Take a moment to give thanks to the Lord for the times He has very specifically lead you in the path He had for your life.

Have you ever felt the Lord speaking encouragement and comfort to your soul? Thank the Lord that He knows what you need and brings the blessing you need at the right time.

Ask God to help you to be more open to how He wants to lead and direct you today. Ask Him to forgive you for a time when you did not listen to the warnings He gave or the direction He wanted you to take.

## Chapter 2 - Genesis: God Speaks Through His People

We have seen how God spoke openly and directly to His people in the book of Genesis. As we continue in Genesis, we see another aspect of the prophetic ministry. Not only did God speak directly to individuals but He also communicated His message through these individuals to others.

In Genesis 27 we read how Isaac blessed his sons Jacob and Esau. Blessings were taken seriously because of their prophetic nature. Disguised as Esau, Jacob approached his father to receive a blessing.

*26 Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come near and kiss me, my son." 27 So he came near and kissed him. And Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him and said,*

*"See, the smell of my son  
is as the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed!*

*28 May God give you of the dew of heaven  
and of the fatness of the earth  
and plenty of grain and wine.*

*29 Let peoples serve you,  
and nations bow down to you.*

*Be lord over your brothers,  
and may your mother's sons bow down to you.*

*Cursed be everyone who curses you,  
and blessed be everyone who blesses you!" (Genesis 27)*



In these words, Isaac told Jacob that the Lord would bless him with the “fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine.” He prophesied that people would serve him, and whole nations would bow down to him. Even his brother Esau would bow to him. These truths were revealed to Isaac from God about his son.

When Esau came to receive his blessing from the Lord and discovered that his brother had taken it, he begged his father to bless him also. Isaac gave this blessing to him:

*39 Then Isaac his father answered and said to him:  
“Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your  
dwelling be,  
and away from the dew of heaven on high.  
40 By your sword you shall live,  
and you shall serve your brother;  
but when you grow restless  
you shall break his yoke from your neck.” (Genesis 27)*

Isaac prophesied that Esau would struggle in life. He would live away from the “fatness of the earth.” He would fight enemies and serve his brother. The day would come, however, when he would break the burden of his brothers control over him.

As we examine the stories of Jacob and Esau, we see how these prophecies came true. The words of Isaac were not just blessings but prophetic statements about the lives of his sons. God gave him these words to show his sons what was going to happen in their lives. God would confirm these words to Jacob when He spoke to him personally in Genesis 28:10-15.

Not all who spoke prophetically were aware that they were doing so. In Genesis 22, God commanded Abraham to take his son and offer him as a burnt offering. Obedient to the Lord, Abraham took Isaac and brought him to the mountain where he laid him on the altar and prepared to

offer him to the Lord as a sacrifice. Before he could do so, however, the Lord stopped him and showed him a ram stuck in a thicket by his horns. In the place of his son, Abraham offered this ram as a burnt offering.

What we need to understand about this incident is that God was not only testing His servant Abraham but also conveying a vital message through him to those who would read this story. It is generally understood that the mountain on which Abraham offered his son was where the Heavenly Father would sacrifice His Son, the Lord Jesus on the cross. Just as God substituted the ram for Abraham's son Isaac, the Lord Jesus would sacrifice His life on our behalf on that mountain. It is unlikely that Abraham and Isaac understood the details of this prophetic act, but by their obedience, they were declaring what would happen in the years to come and how God would provide for the salvation of His people.

As we move toward the end of the book of Genesis, we meet a man by the name of Joseph. God used Joseph as a spokesman on many occasions. As a young boy, Joseph had dreams revealing what would happen in the days to come. In Genesis 37 we have two examples of this kind of dream. We have a record of the first dream in Genesis 37:5-8:

*5 Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. 6 He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: 7 Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." 8 His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. (Genesis 37)*

In this dream, Joseph and his brothers were binding sheaves of wheat in the field. As he watched, his brother's sheaves gathered around him and bowed down to him. Joseph's brothers mocked him saying: "Are you indeed to reign over us?"

The second dream was quite similar:

*9 Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." 10 But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" 11 And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind. (Genesis 37)*

In this second dream, the sun, moon and eleven stars bowed down to Joseph. His father understood this to mean that he and his eleven other sons would bow down to Joseph. Joseph's brothers became angry with him, but his father kept the memory of this dream in his mind.

The day would come when each of his brothers would bow down to Joseph as the ruler of Egypt. None of them had any way of knowing how this would be fulfilled in their lives. When Joseph explained these dreams, his brothers dismissed them as foolishness. God, however, was using Joseph's dreams to show him and his family what was to come.

This was not the only time dreams were used in the life of Joseph to convey the purpose of God. Joseph was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers and brought to Egypt where he would remain for the rest of his life. There in Egypt he was falsely accused of sexual abuse by his boss'

wife and thrown into prison. There in prison, he met the king's cupbearer and baker.

One day the king's cupbearer had a dream that affected him deeply. Joseph noticed that something was troubling him and asked what was wrong. The cupbearer told Joseph his dream.

*9 So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph and said to him, "In my dream, there was a vine before me, 10 and on the vine, there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters ripened into grapes. 11 Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand." (Genesis 40)*

Hearing the dream, Joseph explained its prophetic meaning to the cupbearer. He told him that in three days the king would release him from jail and restore him to his position.

The chief baker also has a dream. When he heard that Joseph had revealed the meaning of the cupbearer's dream, he too wanted to know what his dream meant. He also shared his dream with Joseph:

*16 When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, "I also had a dream: there were three cake baskets on my head, 17 and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head." (Genesis 40)*

Joseph again interpreted the meaning of the dream, telling the baker that in three days the king would cut off his head and hang him on a tree where the birds would eat his flesh.

In time, the Pharaoh of Egypt had two dreams that troubled him. In the first of these dreams, he saw seven fat cows come up out of the Nile to feed on the reed grass. Behind

them came seven thin cows. These thin cows attacked and ate the fat cows.

*1 After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, 2 and behold, there came up out of the Nile seven cows, attractive and plump, and they fed in the reed grass. 3 And behold, seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. 4 And the ugly, thin cows ate up the seven attractive, plump cows. And Pharaoh awoke. (Genesis 41)*

When Pharaoh went to sleep again, he dreamed a second dream. The dream was very similar but related this time to seven good ears of grain that were eaten up by seven thin and blighted ears.

*5 And he fell asleep and dreamed a second time. And behold, seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. 6 And behold, after them sprouted seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind. 7 And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump, full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and behold; it was a dream. (Genesis 41)*

Pharaoh believed that these dreams had a prophetic meaning but could not find anyone to interpret them until the cupbearer told him how Joseph had interpreted his dream. The king released Joseph from prison to hear his dreams.

When asked by Pharaoh to interpret his dream, Joseph is quick to remind him that the interpretation was not from him but God:

*15 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." 16 Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."*

In speaking these words, Joseph was telling the king that the words he would speak to him were not of his own origin. He would only speak what God gave him to say. God revealed to Joseph that the dream foretold seven years of plenty in the land of Egypt followed by seven years of intense drought. Joseph challenged Pharaoh to prepare for these years of drought by selecting a man to oversee the gathering of produce in preparation for the years of famine that were to come. Through these dreams, God was revealing to Pharaoh that trials were ahead for the nation.

While the dreams of the cupbearer, baker, and Pharaoh were revealed directly to them in their sleep, they had no way of understanding them. These prophetic dreams revealed the future but needed someone to explain what God was saying through them. Joseph spoke prophetically to the people of his day through the interpretation of dreams. God would give a dream to an individual and then give Joseph the meaning of that dream. It was by this means that God revealed His purpose to these individuals.

Just before he died, Joseph gave final instructions to his brothers:

*24 And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." 25 Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." (Genesis 50)*

These last words of Joseph were prophetic. In these words, Joseph told his brothers that God was going to bring them out of Egypt and give them their own land. When they left Egypt, they were to take his body with them so that he could be returned to his homeland. The words were not just meant to give instructions about his death but also

to encourage them and reveal the purpose of God for them as a nation.

We see from these passages that God not only spoke directly to individuals but also through His servants to others. Jacob told his sons Isaac and Esau what God had planned for their lives. Joseph explained to his family the purpose God had for them in the days to come. He also communicated the will of God for the cupbearer, baker, and Pharaoh.

We see also in this book of Genesis the means God uses to communicate His purpose. Sometimes God spoke directly to His people. He also spoke prophetically through the blessing a father gave to his son. He illustrated His plan in Christ through Abraham when He asked him to sacrifice his son on the mountain. God spoke to Joseph in dreams and used him as a prophetic interpreter of dreams.

In the book of Genesis, we learn several things about prophecy. First, we see that God was interested in communicating with His people. Second, God used His people as instruments to convey His message. Third, God was not limited to any one means to deliver this message. He spoke in different ways either directly to individuals or through His servants in whatever way He deemed best.

For Consideration:

How does Isaac speak prophetically to his sons when he blessed them? What message did he convey to them?

How did God convey a message about the Lord Jesus and His sacrifice through Abraham and his son Isaac?

Did the person who communicated prophetically always understand what they were saying or doing?

List how God communicated His purpose as discussed in this chapter. What does prophecy look like? Can we limit God to using only one method of speaking to us?

Has God ever used anyone to reveal His purpose for your life or to encourage you in His purpose? How did He do this? What method did He use to bring this encouragement or direction?

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord for the way He wants to communicate with us and reveal His purpose.

Ask the Lord to give you ears to hear what He wants to say to you and how He wants to direct your life.

Thank the Lord for the way He has used others to speak to you in times of need.



Ask God to make you willing to be an instrument in His hands to encourage or bless His people with the words He gives you to share.

## Chapter 3 – Exodus: Moses, God's Spokesman

As we move to the book of Exodus the people of God were in Egypt. Their Egyptian slave masters harshly treated them. At that time, a young mother gave birth to a son by the name of Moses. He would become a powerful leader in the movement to set the nation of Israel free from Egyptian bondage.

Moses, as an Israelite, grew up in the home of Pharaoh's daughter and had all the privileges afforded to him as her adopted son. As he grew up, however, the Lord placed a burden on his heart for the Israelites and their plight. His efforts on their behalf failed, however, when he attempted to win their favour by killing an Egyptian taskmaster. The death of this Egyptian, at the hands of Moses, brought the wrath of Pharaoh on him and he was forced to flee the nation and live in exile in the land of Midian.

After forty years, the Lord spoke to Moses and called him back to Egypt to set his people free. Moses' call came when he saw a burning bush in the desert. The voice of God spoke out of that bush commanding him to return to Egypt. Listen to the words of God to Moses that day as recorded in Exodus 3:10-12:

*10 Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” 11 But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” 12 He*

*said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain." (Exodus 3)*

In those words, God not only gave Moses the direction He wanted him to take but also a promise of success. God promised to be with Moses and assured him that the day would come when he and his people would worship him at the mountain at which he was grazing his sheep. When that happened, Moses would know that God was faithful to His promises.

Moses heard the direction and promise of the Lord but struggled with what he was being asked to do:

*10 But Moses said to the Lord, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue." (Exodus 4)*

Moses did not feel that he could do what God had asked him to do. He told the Lord that he was not an eloquent man and could not speak. Moses understood that if he were to set the people free, he would have to convince Pharaoh to let them go. He did not feel that he had the skills necessary for this task. Moses looked to himself for the skills necessary. He is not looking to God. He had not yet come to understand that God did not need human ability and skill. God responded to Moses' argument in verses 11 and 12:

*11 Then the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? 12 Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak." (Exodus 4)*

Notice what God told Moses in these verses. He would be with Moses' mouth and teach him what he was to speak. When God is with our mouth, our words are empowered. When God teaches us what to speak, all we need to do is share what God has given us. God was showing Moses that He did not have to figure out what to say to Pharaoh. God would give him the words. He did not have to spend hours trying to prepare his logical arguments for Pharaoh. He just had to say what God gave him to say. God was simply asking Moses to be His human mouth to communicate to Pharaoh.

When Moses continued to object, God became angry with him. Despite His anger, however, God proposed a solution for Moses that he found easier to accept:

*14 Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said, "Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. 15 You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do. 16 He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him. (Exodus 4)*

God proposed that Moses' brother Aaron do the speaking. God would tell Moses what He wanted to speak to Pharaoh. Moses would share those words with Aaron and Aaron would pass them on to the people. Notice what God told Moses in verse 16: "he will be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him."

This discussion between God and Moses reveals to us the nature of prophecy. God shows us what we are to say, and we share what He gives us with those to whom He sends us. Prophecy is not sharing our wisdom and insights. It is sharing what God has been giving us.

Speaking God's words did not guarantee success for Moses. He went with the words God gave him to Pharaoh. Pharaoh rejected those words:

*2 But Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover, I will not let Israel go. (Exodus 5)*

The Lord was with Moses' mouth, and He taught him what to say, but those words were rejected. Being God's spokesman did not mean that Moses or his words would be received by those to whom he spoke. This was a hard lesson for Moses to learn. When Pharaoh responded to the words of Moses by making Israel's burden greater, Moses cried out to God:

*22 Then Moses turned to the Lord and said, "O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? 23 For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all." (Exodus 5)*

Speaking God's word was, on the one hand, an exciting ministry. Seeing how people responded to those words, was another matter. Moses had to learn that as a prophet, he would not always be accepted. His words, though they were from God, would often be rejected. This would be a painful lesson for many prophets in Scripture.

Over the course of months that followed, God would direct Moses through the unfolding of a series of ten plagues on the nation of Egypt. Ten times, Moses returned to Pharaoh with the word of the Lord and a warning of a plague if he rejected that word. As Pharaoh resisted the prophetic word of the Lord, the nation was left suffering and starving for food.

The prophetic ministry of Moses was not only directed toward Pharaoh. A good portion of the book of Exodus is

devoted to the Lord's words through Moses for the nation of Israel. In Exodus 12, for example, God instructed Moses on how to prepare for the final plague that would kill the firstborn of every home in the nation of Egypt. In these instructions God instituted the celebration of the Passover – a yearly event celebrated by the Jewish community. God's directions for this celebration were quite precise. God shared with Moses, the kind of lamb that he was to slaughter, what he was to do with the blood of the lamb, what God's people were to eat and how they were to eat the evening meal. Moses, as God's mouthpiece, shared every detail with the people.

God called Moses up to the mountain in Exodus 19 and spoke with him about the requirements He had for His people. There on the mountaintop, God summarized His moral requirements in ten commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). He taught him how to offer sacrifices (Exodus 20:22-26), how to treat slaves (Exodus 21:1-11) and the obligation of every citizen toward each other (Exodus 21:12-35). God told Moses what He expected when a man was caught stealing from his neighbour (Exodus 22:1-4) and what He expected of those who loaned money to a friend (Exodus 22:14-15). He told Moses about the various festivals He wanted his people to practice each year and the types of offerings they were to bring to Him on those occasions (Exodus 23:10-19). Finally, God promised that He would bring His people to their own land and bless them as a nation if they walked with Him (Exodus 23:20-33).

What is significant for us to note is what Moses did with all the words the Lord spoke to him on that mountain:

*3 Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do." 4 And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. He rose early in the morning and built an altar*

*at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. (Exodus 24)*

As the prophetic mouthpiece of God, Moses gathered all the people and shared with them “all the words of the Lord and all the rules.” To be sure that they would be remembered, Moses took this a step further and wrote the words of the Lord down on a scroll. This is the first record of prophecy put into writing. The words of God through Moses were intended not just for that generation but for generations to come.

The ministry of Moses, as a prophet, was to communicate the purpose of God for the people. In this sense, the prophetic ministry of Moses was also a teaching ministry. Through this gift, God instructed His people in what He expected from them. These words were written down so that they could be passed on from generation to generation. Teachers would later instruct God’s people in these prophetic words and help them to understand and apply these principles. What would become Israel’s laws and regulations were given prophetically to Moses from God.

Not only did the laws and regulations of Israel come through a prophet who spoke directly with God, but we see from Exodus 25 that God instructed Moses in how to build the tabernacle and each article used in its service. God’s instructions about the items used in worship were precise. He told Moses how much gold or silver to use for each item. He gave him exact measurements for the ark of the covenant and the table used to hold the bread. From the decorations on the candlesticks to the colour and designs that were embroidered on the curtains, all these details were carefully laid out by God for Moses. Moses, in turn, would share the words of God with the people and oversee the production of each article to be sure that it was in line with the instructions God gave him. Every detail of the

tabernacle came to Israel through prophecy, spoken directly to Moses from God.

Moses' prophetic calling was not only used for teaching the people the requirements of God but also to guide them through the wilderness. As the people left the land of Egypt, God spoke to Moses to tell him the direction the people were to take:

*1 Then the Lord said to Moses, 2 "Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. 3 For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, 'They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.' 4 And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord." And they did so. (Exodus 14)*

When Pharaoh pursued the children of Israel with his army, everything looked hopeless. God, however, instructed Moses in what to do:

*15 The Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. 16 Lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground. (Exodus 14)*

No human wisdom would lead the people to expect that waters of the sea would open to them and set them free from the pursuing army. This was a word from the Lord to Moses.

When the people were without food, the Lord told Moses that he would rain down bread from heaven (Exodus 16:4). When the people grumbled because they had no water, God told Moses to take his staff and strike a rock, and it



would provide water for the nation (Exodus 17:5-7). When the water in Marah was so bitter the people could not drink it. It was a word from the Lord to Moses that brought the solution (Exodus 15:22-26).

While Moses seems to be the one who heard from God and conveyed His truth to the people, it is important to note a reference to Moses' sister Miriam in Exodus 15:

*20 Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. 21 And Miriam sang to them:*

*"Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;  
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea."*

Miriam is called a prophetess in Exodus 15:20. This appears to be the only place in Scripture that indicates that Miriam was a prophetess. We know very little about how she exercised her prophetic ministry. The context of Exodus 15:20-21 may, however, give an example of how she used her gift—through music.

As we continue our study of prophecy and the prophetic ministry, we will see other connections between music and prophecy. Suffice it to say here that this is the first connection that is made between a prophetess and music. It is not without coincidence that many of the prophetic passages of Scripture come in the form of poetry. God inspired people to communicate His word in a variety of ways. Moses wrote down the words God gave him so that they would be preserved for generations to come. Sometimes God will speak to His people through the music He has inspired, to remind them of His promises or His purpose for their lives. Like the words of Moses written down on a tablet, these prophetic words put to music are passed on for generations and sung repeatedly by God's people.

What does Exodus teach us about prophecy and the prophetic ministry? We learn that God sometimes directed His people into His purpose by speaking directly to them. This was the case for Moses and his call at the burning bush to return to Egypt.

Secondly, prophecy is not about sharing personal ideas or thoughts, but speaking what God has given. God told Moses that He would give him the words to speak to Pharaoh. Moses did not have to study and organize these thoughts before he went to Pharaoh. He merely conveyed to Pharaoh what God had put on his lips.

Thirdly, the prophetic ministry, though it is from God, was not always accepted or appreciated. Moses learned this the hard way. Though he spoke what God gave him, Pharaoh rejected what Moses said. The lives of the Israelite slaves became more difficult before they were released. Moses had to share what God gave him to say even when it proved difficult.

Fourthly, God used the prophetic ministry of Moses to teach His people about His requirements for them as a people. He instructed Moses in the sacrifices and lifestyle He expected, and Moses taught these truths to the people just as God had shown him.

Fifthly, God used the prophetic ministry of Moses to provide solutions for His people in difficult times. When the people did not know what to do, God spoke to Moses and showed him the answer. It was the advice of the Lord that provided water from the Rock. It was the counsel of the Lord that showed the people that they were to cross the Red Sea.

Finally, we see how prophetic words were sometimes written down or memorized to preserve them for future generations. This was the case for the Law of God given to

Moses. It may also have been the case for prophetic words set to music and sung by God's people in worship.

For Consideration:

What is the connection between the Law of Israel and the prophetic ministry of Moses?

What is the difference between human logic and prophecy?

How did Moses use his prophetic calling to lead the people of God through the desert?

Can there be a connection between prophecy and music?  
How could music preserve the prophetic message?

Why is it essential that we understand that the Bible comes from God through His prophets and is not of human origin?

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord that the truth of Scripture has been given to us as God's servants faithfully wrote what He told them.

Thank Him that it is reliable and trustworthy because it is from Him.

Thank the Lord that He is still willing to direct and guide you personally in times of struggle and confusion.

How has God spoken to you? Have you ever been encouraged by the Lord? Has he ever directed you in the way you should go? Take a moment to thank Him for how He guides and strengthens His people.



## Chapter 4 - The Law and Prophecy

As the people of God left Egypt and set out into the desert, it was Moses who led them. Moses had a powerful prophetic calling from the Lord. He was God's national spokesman for the people. God would often speak to Moses and tell him what to say the nation.

In Leviticus 24 we have the story of a son of an Israelite mother and Egyptian father. This young man fought with a man in the Israelite camp. During the fight, it appears that this young man blasphemed the name of the Lord. He was brought to Moses and put in custody until Moses could ask the Lord what to do about him.

*10 Now an Israelite woman's son, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the people of Israel. And the Israelite woman's son and a man of Israel fought in the camp, 11 and the Israelite woman's son blasphemed the Name, and cursed. Then they brought him to Moses. His mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan. 12 And they put him in custody, till the will of the Lord should be clear to them. (Leviticus 24)*

Moses went to the Lord to inquire about this man. The Lord told Moses in Leviticus 24:13-16:

*13 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 14 "Bring out of the camp the one who cursed, and let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. 15 And speak to the people of Israel,*

*saying, Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. 16 Whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death. (Leviticus 24)*

The Lord made it clear to Moses that day what he was to tell the people. This young man was to be stoned to death and a warning given to the entire Israelite camp that whoever blasphemed the name of the Lord would be put to death. The word that Moses heard that day came directly from God and was to guide the people in what they were to do.

We sometimes get the idea that prophecy is about future events. This is not always the case. Prophecy relates to God's revelation of His purpose, will, and heart. Some prophecy refers to the future purpose of God, but a good part of prophecy speaks to the here and now.

A quick search for the phrase "the Lord spoke to Moses" in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy show us that the phrase is repeated about 79 times in these books. This is significant. It shows us that Moses had a significant role to play in revealing the purpose of God to his people. That purpose was not only explained in specific details, as in the case of the young man who cursed the Lord but also through the various laws God gave Moses as recorded in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. All these requirements came directly from God through His servant Moses.

We see the significance of this prophetic role of Moses when his brother and sister complained that he had married a Cushite woman (Numbers 12:1). Their complaint did not stop there, however. They went on to grumble about the prophetic ministry of Moses:

*2 And they said, "Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" And the Lord heard it. (Numbers 12)*

Miriam was described as a prophetess in Exodus 15:20. When Moses told God that he could not speak, God told him that He would make his brother Aaron his prophet (see Exodus 4:14-16). Both Miriam and Aaron felt they had a prophetic gift and calling. What they were seeing, however, is that the Lord was speaking much more through Moses. The people were looking to him to seek that Lord on their behalf. There may have been an element of jealousy here in these siblings. What is crucial for us to see, however, is that the gift of prophecy was not limited to Moses.

When the Lord heard Aaron and Miriam grumbling about Moses and his prophetic calling, He demanded that they approach Him at the tabernacle. That day Moses, Miriam and Aaron all stood before God to hear from Him. As they stood before Him, a pillar of cloud came and remained at the entrance to the tabernacle.

There in the presence of that cloudy pillar, the Lord spoke these words to Miriam and Aaron:

*6 And he said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. 7 Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. 8 With him, I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" 9 And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and he departed. (Numbers 12)*

God told Miriam and Aaron that the usual way He spoke through a prophet was through dreams visions and riddles that needed interpretation. God chose, however, to talk to



Moses face to face. He even revealed His form to Moses. God had a special relationship with Moses. He had called him to a very particular prophetic ministry. When God gave instructions to Moses about His law, He was very clear. There were no riddles or any chance of misunderstanding. The words of the law God gave to Moses were too important to commit to the interpretation of any human being. What God taught Moses was direct, clear and precise. This is what Moses wrote down for the people to follow.

That day God was angry with Miriam and Aaron because they were jealous and spoke harshly about the role He had given Moses. Miriam seemed particularly jealous and angry with Moses. When the cloud departed from the tabernacle, she became leprous and was separated from the people of God until was again restored to health. God protected His servant Moses from the grumbling of his brother and sister and reminded them that God chooses the people He pleases to be His representatives. This appears to be the first conflict we see in Scripture between fellow prophets. It would not, however, be the last.

In Numbers 22 we meet another prophet by the name of Balaam. He is a very different type of prophet. Balaam was not even an Israelite. From Deuteronomy 23:4 we discover that Balaam, the son of Beor was from Pethor in Mesopotamia. He was known as a prophet or diviner. Israel was not the only nation to have prophets. Many of the foreign countries of the day consulted prophets and diviners to understand the will of the gods. God warned His people about these prophets and diviners in Deuteronomy 18:

*10 There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer 11 or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, 12 for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord. And*

*because of these abominations the Lord your God is driving them out before you. 13 You shall be blameless before the Lord your God, 14 for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you to do this. (Deuteronomy 18)*

The difference between these diviners and the prophets of God was, in part, the fact that the prophets of God sought the God of Israel and His guidance. Diviners often did not know God, and they consulted other gods or spirits for direction.

At this time, Israel's army was marching toward the Promised Land. God was giving them great military victories in this region. The king of Moab was fearful of what would happen to him and his people if the Israelites were not stopped. He did not want to fight them, however, because God was with them. King Balak of Moab consulted with the Midianites to see what they could do to defeat Israel. Together they sent for Balaam the diviner and asked him to curse the Israelites. It appears that Balaam had a reputation as a powerful diviner:

*4 And Moab said to the elders of Midian, "This horde will now lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field." So Balak the son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, 5 sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the Rivera in the land of the people of Amaw, to call him, saying, "Behold, a people has come out of Egypt. They cover the face of the earth, and they are dwelling opposite me. 6 Come now, curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed." 7 So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the*

*fees for divination in their hand. And they came to Balaam and gave him Balak's message. (Numbers 22)*

When these Moabite and Midianite messengers arrived with an invitation, Balaam told them that he would first consult with the God of Israel before he gave them an answer. We have a record of the conversation between the Lord God of Israel and this pagan diviner in Numbers 22:

*9 And God came to Balaam and said, "Who are these men with you?" 10 And Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, saying, 11 'Behold, a people has come out of Egypt, and it covers the face of the earth. Now come, curse them for me. Perhaps I shall be able to fight against them and drive them out.'" 12 God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed." 13 So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, "Go to your own land, for the Lord has refused to let me go with you." (Numbers 22)*

God made it clear to Balaam that He did not want him to go with the servants of King Balak, so Balaam sent them home.

When the king sent his servants back to Balaam, the Lord agreed to let him return with them to King Balak but told Balaam that he was only to say what He gave him to say (Numbers 22:20). When King Balak asked Balaam to curse the Israelites, instead of cursing the people of Israel, Balaam blessed them. On two other occasions King Balak asked Balaam to curse Israel, but on each occurrence, Balaam received the words from the Lord and blessed them instead (see Numbers 23:18-24; 24:3-9).

What is significant for us to see is what happened to the Israelites after this incident:

*1 While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. 2 These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. 3 So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. (Numbers 25)*

*6 And behold, one of the people of Israel came and brought a Midianite woman to his family, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the whole congregation of the people of Israel, while they were weeping in the entrance of the tent of meeting. 7 When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose and left the congregation and took a spear in his hand 8 and went after the man of Israel into the chamber and pierced both of them, the man of Israel and the woman through her belly. Thus the plague on the people of Israel was stopped. (Numbers 25)*

The Moabite and Midianite women tempted the Israelite men into corrupt religious practices. The Lord sent a curse upon the land in those days. According to Numbers 25:9 the plague that resulted from this immorality took the lives of twenty-four thousand people.

In Numbers 31 the Lord commanded the Israelite army to take vengeance on the Midianites. The military went out in obedience to the Lord's command and killed every male in the region (Numbers 31:7). They captured the woman and children, however, and did not put them to death (Numbers 31:9). When Moses heard that they did not kill the women, he was angry with them and spoke these words:

*15 Moses said to them, "Have you let all the women live? 16 Behold, these, on Balaam's advice, caused the people of Israel to act treacherously against the Lord in the incident of Peor, and so the plague came among the congregation of the Lord. (Numbers 31)*

What is striking is that it was these pagan women who led the men of Israel to sin and brought the plague on the nation. The men, however, refused to kill those who had drawn them away from God. Moses reminded the men that it was on Balaam's advice that the women began to tempt them to sin. The apostle John repeats this in Revelation 2 when he said:

*14 But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. (Revelation 2)*

According to Revelation 2:14, Balaam taught King Balak how to put a stumbling block before the men of Israel so that they would bow down to idols and practice sexual immorality.

What is quite clear is that Balaam was not a true prophet of God. He heard from God and spoke the words God gave him—possibly because he feared for his life. While he appeared to be speaking the words of God, Balaam taught Israel's enemies how to tempt them and weaken their faith. His ungodly advice was responsible for the death of twenty-four thousand Israelites at the hand of God. Not all who speak for God truly belong to him. Balaam is one of the first false prophets we meet in the Bible. He, however, would not be the last.

In Deuteronomy 13 the Lord God warned His people about prophets who would lead them astray:

*1 "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, 2 and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,' 3 you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the Lord*

*your God is testing you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him. 5 But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. (Deuteronomy 13)*

Notice what Deuteronomy 13 tells us about the false prophet. The prophet described in this passage was able to perform signs and wonders. These signs and wonders were supernatural occurrences designed to prove the authenticity of the prophet and his or her message. People would see these unexplainable signs and believe that they were from God.

Notice also in Deuteronomy 13 that the words the prophet spoke came to pass. Again, there is no greater confirmation of the validity of a prophet than the fact that what they say comes to pass.

There is one more detail about the prophet in this passage, however. Verse 2 tells us that this prophet encouraged the people to seek other gods. This detail alone was enough to turn from this prophet and reject what he or she said – “you shall not listen to the words of that prophet” (Deuteronomy 13:3). In fact, verse 5 tells us that this prophet was to be put to death. He or she was not to be allowed to spread a message of rebellion against the one true God.

What we need to understand here is that a false prophet could predict the future and perform great signs and wonders. This would deceive many. The true prophet,

however, was not judged by his signs and accurate predictions, but by the message he or she spoke. Did the word spoken lead people to God? No true prophet of God would lead people to worship other gods. No true prophet of God would lead them to do what God forbade in His law. The prophet was subject to the Law of God.

This same truth is repeated in Deuteronomy 18 where Moses tells the people that God would raise up another prophet like him in the days to come. Notice, however, what the passage tells us about discerning whether this prophet was a true prophet from God:

*18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19 And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. 20 But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.’ 21 And if you say in your heart, ‘How may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?’— 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; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him. (Deuteronomy 18)*

The true prophet of God spoke with authority. That authority came from God who gave him the message to share. Because the word came from God, those who received it were responsible for listening and obeying.

Deuteronomy 18 also warns us, however, that not all prophets are from God. Verse 20 tells us that there were those who presumed to speak a word from the Lord, but the Lord did not send them. These prophets spoke from their own heart and understanding, but they did not speak

the words God gave them. This shows us that prophecy has its origin in God and not human reason. There have been times in my teaching when the Lord seemed to give me a specific application of the passage I was teaching for the individuals in the room. This application or truth was not something I prepared, but it was given as I taught.

In some cases, this application was for a particular person. True prophets speak what God gives them to say. They are sent and compelled by God to share what He has given them.

We see also from Deuteronomy 18:20 that all true prophecy comes from God alone. The prophet who spoke in the name of another god was a false prophet. Any such prophet was not tolerated in Israel. Those who spoke in the name of other gods were killed and their influence removed from the land. The people of God would know that a prophet's words were not from God because they encouraged disobedience to the one true God and His revealed Word (see Deuteronomy 13:1-5).

The people of God would also know the difference between a true and a false prophet by the fact that the word they spoke came to pass. The God of Israel was a God of truth. If He gave a message to a prophet, it would come to pass as He said –He would fulfil His purposes as revealed through His servants.

There is an interesting passage in Numbers 11 that sheds some light on the ministry of prophecy. Here in this passage, the Lord told Moses to take seventy elders and bring them to the tabernacle. God told Moses that He would put a portion of His Spirit on them. In obedience to the Lord, Moses called these elders to the tabernacle.

*[25] Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit*



*rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it. (Numbers 11)*

Notice what happens here. The presence of the Spirit of God on these elders caused them to prophesy. We are not told what they said, but the experience was a sign from God that something had happened to them. What is vital for us to see is that while the Spirit of God did not necessarily leave them, they did not continue to prophesy. This was a one-time occurrence showing those present that God had placed a portion of His Spirit on them. This, however, was not how God's Spirit would continue to work in them. They would prophesy no more but be empowered to minister as elders of God's people. We see from this that it is possible for a person to prophesy even though they are not a prophet. God can give a prophetic word to anyone He chooses and uses them to communicate His purpose.

What do Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy teach us about the prophet and the prophetic ministry? Let me summarize what we have seen in these three books.

First, God spoke prophetically through Moses to direct and guide His people in the path He had laid out for them. He showed them how to apply the truth of the revealed Law to life. The Law of God that Moses wrote down was given through direct revelation from God. God spoke to Moses and told him what He required from His people. Prophecy is not always about future events but also about what God expects of us here and now. God speaks to our present situation and reveals His purpose.

God spoke in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy to His prophets using dreams, visions, and riddles. These dreams, visions, and riddles needed to be interpreted to be understood by the intended listener. Moses was the

exception to this rule. To Moses, God spoke face to face as a man would speak to a friend.

We are introduced in these books to the false prophet. Balaam was a foreigner who heard from God and spoke the words God gave him to speak. You don't have to be a believer to hear from God. Balaam, however, proved his true character by advising King Balak on how to cause the Israelite men to stumble and follow other gods.

Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy encourage us to make a clear distinction between the true prophet of God and the false prophet. True prophecy comes from God and is in line with His revealed truth as found in the Scripture. False prophecy came from the human mind, other gods or spirits and encouraged disobedience to the Law of God.

False prophets were able to predict the future. Some of them could even perform signs and wonders. The child of God was not to be deceived by these false prophets. The word of these prophets was to be judged by how it fell in line with the revealed truth of God in His word. If what the prophet said was not in agreement with God's law, it was to be judged false and the false prophet killed. True prophecy honoured God and His purpose. Because true prophecy came from a God who could not lie, it would come to pass.

It would have been easy for the people of God in the days of Moses to say, "If there are false prophets out there and they can easily deceive us, why not reject prophecy completely and focus only on the Law of God which is very clear?" While this attitude may avoid being deceived by false prophets, it was not the purpose of God who called true prophets to speak on His behalf. In Deuteronomy 18 God commanded His people to listen to the prophets He sent them:

*18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19 And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. (Deuteronomy 18)*

Notice in verse 19 that the Lord expected that His people listen to the words His prophets spoke to them. The requirement of God was not only that His people obey the Law Moses had written out for them but also to listen to His prophets who would speak to them in His name. These prophets would correct the people of God when they were going astray. They would challenge them in the practical application of the truth of the Law in their lives. While prophecy was to be held in subjection to the Law of God, it was not to be despised or rejected.

For Consideration:

How did God use prophecy to reveal His Law to the people of Moses' day?

In what way was Moses unique as a prophet? How did God usually reveal His purposes to prophets at this time?

Was Balaam a true or false prophet? How do we know?

Can unbelievers or false prophets hear from God? Is it possible for a false prophet to speak a word from the Lord? Consider Balaam in your answer.

What is the connection between the Law of God and true prophecy? Does true prophecy ever encourage disobedience to God and His revealed purpose in the Law?

Can the prophecies of a false prophet come true? If their predictions come true, how are we to discern if these prophets are false?

If it is possible to be deceived by false prophets, should we avoid prophecy altogether so as not to fall into error? What does Deuteronomy 18:18-19 teach us?

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord that He encourages and challenges His people through those who hear from Him and speak His heart.

Do you know believers who are involved in pagan divination, astrology, and other such practices? Ask the Lord to set them free from such practices.

Thank the Lord that He doesn't just give us His written word to figure out by ourselves but also His Spirit and His servants to encourage us in the understanding and application of that written Word.

Ask God to help you to evaluate everything you hear against the truth that has been written down for us in the Bible. Ask Him to enable you to be a greater student of His Word, so that you are not deceived.

Thank the Lord for how he rose up prophets in the books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy to guide His people into the application of the truth of His Law and His specific purpose for their lives. Thank the Lord that He did not leave His people in sin but rose up prophets who challenged them to live in obedience to that truth.

## Chapter 5 - Joshua, Judges, and Ruth: The Word of the Lord was Rare

For many years, Moses had been a prophet to the people of God. At his death, there was a significant loss, and the prophetic ministry seemed to decline in Israel. Under the leadership of Joshua, there does not appear to be any key prophetic figure. God continued to speak to Joshua and lead him into His purpose, however. We have for example of the command of the Lord to Joshua in chapter 5:

*2 At that time the Lord said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the sons of Israel a second time." 3 So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth. 4 And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way after they had come out of Egypt. (Joshua 5)*

As the people prepared to take over the land of Canaan, the Lord gave Joshua a word for the people. They were to circumcise every male in the nation. There was not to be any disobedience in the camp as they prepared to face their enemies.

In Joshua 6, the Lord again instructed Joshua on how he was to take the city of Jericho. The priests were to walk around the wall once for six days. On the seventh day, they

were to walk around its perimeter seven times and blow the trumpet. The Lord told Joshua that only then were they to attack the city. God spoke directly to Joshua to show him the purpose He had for this battle.

Joshua destroyed the city of Jericho and killed its inhabitants with the sword. When the task was completed Joshua declared a prophetic curse on the city:

*26 Joshua laid an oath on them at that time, saying, "Cursed before the Lord be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho.*

*"At the cost of his firstborn shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates." (Joshua 6)*

Joshua declared that day that anyone who tried to rebuild the city would do so at the cost of their youngest child. About five hundred years later, a man Hiel of Bethel decided to rebuild the city of Jericho. Notice what happened to him as a result:

*34 In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun. (1 Kings 16)*

Heil laid the foundation at the cost of his firstborn son. When he set up the gates of the city, his youngest son died. This was in direct fulfilment of the prophecy of Joshua when he destroyed the city in his day.

When the city of Jericho was defeated, nothing was to be taken from it. Everything was to be destroyed. A man by the name of Achan, however, took a beautiful cloak, 200 shekels of silver and a gold bar from Jericho and hid it in his tent. This resulted in the defeat of Israel's army at the

town of Ai. When Joshua asked the Lord why the army had been defeated, the Lord told him that it was because someone in their midst had taken forbidden articles from Jericho. The Lord revealed to Joshua what was hidden from his eyes. He also would expose the person who had taken these articles. Achan was confronted with his sin. He and his family were killed, and the blessing of God restored to the nation. The only way that this sin could be discovered was by direct revelation from God. God revealed these things to Joshua for the good of the nation.

In Judges 2 we read how the angel of the Lord appeared to the people of God to bring them a word of encouragement and exhortation:

*1 Now the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, 2 and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? 3 So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you." (Judges 2)*

We are not told in the passage who this angel was but what is clear is that he came with a direct word from the Lord for the people. He reminded them that he would never leave them or break his covenant with them. He also warned them about pursuing false gods, telling them to drive them out of the land they were about to settle.

This same angel would later appear to a man by the name of Gideon in Judges 6. He had a message from the Lord for him:

*11 Now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite,*



*while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine-press to hide it from the Midianites. 12 And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, "The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor." (Judges 6)*

The angel would go on to tell Gideon that the Lord God had called him to be a deliverer of His people. This was the farthest thing from Gideon's mind at the time. The word spoken by this angel was a surprise to Gideon, but he would go on to be a great leader among his people as the angel prophesied. Gideon realized the call of God on his life through that prophetic word from the angel.

At the time that the angel of the Lord spoke to Gideon, the nation of Israel had reached a low point. The Midianites had overpowered them and were making life very difficult. Judges 6 describes the oppression of the Midianites in those days:

*2 And the hand of Midian overpowered Israel, and because of Midian the people of Israel made for themselves the dens that are in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds. 3 For whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. 4 They would encamp against them and devour the produce of the land, as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel and no sheep or ox or donkey. 5 For they would come up with their livestock and their tents; they would come like locusts in number—both they and their camels could not be counted—so that they laid waste the land as they came in. 6 And Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel cried out for help to the Lord. (Judges 6)*

Israel found themselves in desperate need, with no food or proper homes. When they cried out to the Lord for help,

Judges 6 tells us that the Lord sent a prophet to speak to them:

*7 When the people of Israel cried out to the Lord on account of the Midianites, 8 the Lord sent a prophet to the people of Israel. And he said to them, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of slavery. 9 And I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. 10 And I said to you, 'I am the Lord your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.' But you have not obeyed my voice." (Judges 6)*

The prophet of God reminded the people of how they had disobeyed the Lord, and their condition was a direct result of that disobedience. Through the prophet, the Lord brought clarity and understanding of their situation. This prophet connected their deplorable conditions to their rebellion against God.

In Judges 4 we are introduced to the prophetess Deborah. She was the wife of one of Israel's judges. Judges 4:5 tells us that the people would come to her seeking the will of the Lord:

*5 She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment. (Judges 4)*

In Judges 4 Deborah challenged the military commander Barak to take up arms against Sisera. Fearful of this challenge, Barak told Deborah that he would only fight Sisera if she went with him. Deborah agreed but told Barak that he would not receive the glory for the conquest. God would give this glory to a woman. As the battle ensued, Israel gained the upper hand, and commander Sisera fled. Exhausted, he came to the tent of a woman by the name of

Jael. Inviting him in to rest, Jael waited until he was asleep and drove a tent peg through his head, killing him. She would receive the credit for conquering this great enemy of Israel, just as Deborah prophesied.

While the Lord did continue to direct His people during the conquest of Canaan and the period of the judges, we read in 1 Samuel 3:1 that the word of God was becoming rare:

*1 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision. (1 Samuel 3)*

The word of the Lord spoken of here did not refer to the written Law of Moses. This was available to the people. Notice how the author explains what he meant when he said that the word of the Lord was rare. He went on to say that there was no frequent vision. The word of the Lord refers to the prophetic word that came through visions and dreams. In other words, prophets were rare or were not receiving revelations from the Lord for His people.

It may be that the prophetic word was rare because of the spiritual condition of the land. The prophet who spoke in Judges 6:7-9 reminded the people of the day that they had been disobedient to the Lord. They were not in a place spiritually where they were ready to listen to the Lord. As a result, the Lord withdrew His prophets, and only rarely did He speak through them.

This period of Israel's history adds yet another layer to our understanding of the prophetic ministry. In these books, the Lord spoke directly to His people to direct them. He revealed to Joshua how he wanted him to take the city of Jericho. He showed Gideon that He wanted him to be a leader among His people.

God also revealed hidden things through prophecy. When Joshua asked the Lord what it was that had caused their

defeat at Ai, the Lord show him that there was sin in the camp. He also revealed the person who had sinned. God did this to remove sin and restore His blessing. Prophecy sometimes exposes what is hidden from human eyes.

Prophecy also brings clarity and connections. When the people of Israel cried out to God because they had no food, the Lord sent his prophet to teach them why this was happening. That prophet connected their problems with the fact that they were disobedient.

Finally, we see from 1 Samuel 3:1 that there are times when God seems to refrain from speaking to His people because of their disobedience. God wants listening ears. If we are not willing to listen, then He may refrain from talking.

As we consider the nature of the prophecy that took place in this period of Israel's history, we see that it would have been a fearful thing for Israel to hear from the Lord rarely. Using prophecy, God directed His people into His purpose. He showed them the obstacles that hindered blessing. His prophets warned them of danger and clarified God's will. Without this prophetic ministry, God's people were left confused and without specific direction in their lives.

I wonder if we would miss this ministry if it were taken from us today? Have we come to a place in our lives where we feel that we no longer need to hear from God? What would happen if we no longer sensed the direction of the Lord in our ministry? What would happen if we no longer felt the prompting of the Holy Spirit to go somewhere or to speak something from the Lord to a needy believer? What would happen if everything was left to human reason and understanding—if we spoke only what came from our own understanding and not from the Lord? How long would it be before we began to sense a significant loss of spiritual power and intimacy with God?

For Consideration:

Was the Law of Moses enough to guide Joshua into the purpose of God for the conquest of Jericho? How did God specifically lead Joshua in the method he wanted to use to defeat Jericho?

How did Joshua understand the reason why he could not defeat the city of Ai? Does God bring this kind of revelation today?

How did Gideon and commander Barak come to understand the call of God on their lives? Does God still call people to ministry in this way?

How has God directed you in what He wants you to do or what He wants you to say?

What keeps God from revealing His purpose today?

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord that He not only gives us His written word but also directs us personally into His purpose.

Thank the Lord that when we pray, we speak to a God who is more than willing to reveal His purpose.

Ask God to help you to understand that while we may be dull of hearing He still wants to lead us and speak to us?



## Chapter 6 - Samuel

In the book of 1 Samuel, we meet a young mother who struggled to have a child. We find her in the temple of the Lord. She is praying. With tears in her eyes and a heart filled with grief, she pleads with God to give her a child. That prayer was answered, and Hannah bore a son by the name of Samuel, whom she committed to the Lord.

Samuel grew up at the temple as a young servant of the priest Eli. The days in which Samuel lived were difficult spiritually. Samuel's sons are described very bluntly in 1 Samuel 2:

*[12] Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the LORD. (1 Samuel 2)*

We have examples in 1 Samuel 2 of how these two sons of Samuel would take portions of the offering from the people by force. (1 Samuel 2:14-16). Further evidence of their evil is seen in 1 Samuel 2:22-23:

*[22] Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. [23] And he said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people. (1 Samuel 2)*



The very men who were to be an example of morality and godliness were sleeping with the women who worked at the temple entrance.

Eli, the priest, for whom the young Samuel worked, was not without his own faults and sins. In 1 Samuel 2:27 the Lord sent a prophet to rebuke him:

*[27] And there came a man of God to Eli and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Did I indeed reveal myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt subject to the house of Pharaoh? [28] Did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? I gave to the house of your father all my offerings by fire from the people of Israel. [29] Why then do you scorn my sacrifices and my offerings that I commanded for my dwelling, and honor your sons above me by fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?' (1 Samuel 2)*

God rebuked Eli for honouring his sinful sons more than Him. These sons took the choicest meat by force from the people who came to offer their sacrifices. Samuel did not hesitate to eat this meat and fatten himself on it. God was angry with him for this.

1 Samuel 3:1 tells us that the word of the Lord was rare in those days. This reference to the word of the Lord being rare is not a reference to the written law that Moses wrote but rather the prophetic word of the Lord spoken through prophets. In other words, God was only rarely speaking through His prophets in those days—for the most part, God was silent.

These were the days in which Samuel lived. The priests of the land did not know the Lord or walk in obedience to the Law of God. Prophets were not hearing from the Lord. The

general public went through the motions, but there was a general spiritual apathy in the land.

One night when young Samuel went to bed, the Lord God spoke to him and called him by name. (1 Samuel 3:4-5). Samuel had never heard from the Lord in this way but the voice that called him was very clear. Thinking that Eli had called him, he went to the priest and asked him why he had called. Eli told him that he had not called him, so Samuel went back to bed.

That same night the voice of the Lord called again. For a second time, Samuel went to Eli to ask him why he had called him. Eli again let Samuel know that he had not called him. Wondering why Samuel felt he heard his name being called, Eli wondered if the Lord wanted to speak to him. Before sending him back to bed this time, Eli has a word of advice for the young boy:

*[9] Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. (1 Samuel 3)*

Eli opened Samuel's mind to the fact that God could be speaking to him. Samuel had never experienced this before, so it was all new to him.

When the Lord called a third time, Samuel followed the advice of Eli and asked the Lord to speak to him. That night the Lord had an important word for Samuel:

*[11] Then the LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. [12] On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. [13] And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not*

*restrain them. [14] Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever." (1 Samuel 3)*

God told Samuel that He was going to do something in Israel that would cause the people to be shocked and dismayed. He was going to punish Eli and his family for their blasphemy. Their sins would never be forgiven. These would have been hard words for Samuel to hear

When he woke the next morning, Eli demanded to know what the Lord had said to Samuel. It would not have been easy for Samuel to share these words with Eli. This, however, was part of his training in the prophetic ministry. God gave him this message for a purpose. He was to share it with Eli as a warning and judgement. I am sure that as Samuel shared the word of the Lord to Eli, he discovered just how difficult the ministry of the prophet would be. Not everyone would like what he had to tell them, but he was to be obedient in sharing what God gave him, nonetheless. This would be the beginning of the ministry of Samuel as a prophet.

For the rest of his life, Samuel would serve as a prophet and judge in Israel. His reputation as a prophet of God grew, and people would come to him to seek the will of the Lord. This was the case in 1 Samuel 8 when the people of God demanded that Samuel ask the Lord to give them a king like the nations around them. To this point, the Lord was their King. The people, however, wanted a king they could see and hear. They preferred a human king to God.

When Samuel brought this matter to the Lord, the Lord gave him a word for the people. In 1 Samuel 8:10-17 the Lord told the people through Samuel that a king would take their sons and put them in his army. He would take their sons and daughters and make them servants for his cause. He would demand the best of their fields,

vineyards, and orchards for himself. He would demand one-tenth of their produce for his own needs. The day would come when they would cry out to God because of the abuse of their king but God would not answer their prayers. These prophetic words of Samuel did not deter the people. They willingly accepted these conditions and continued to demand a king.

While people did not always listen to Samuel, they kept coming to him for help. In 1 Samuel 9, we read about a young man by the name of Saul. His father's donkeys escaped, and he and another young man went out looking for them. When they could not find the donkeys, Saul decided to return home, lest his father started to worry for them. Before returning home, however, the young man with Saul told him that Samuel was in the region. He suggested that they consult him to see if he could show them where the donkeys were. Together they agreed and went in search of Samuel.

This incident shows us what people thought about the prophet in those days. They consulted the prophet not just for critical spiritual matters but also for everyday situations. They understood that God knew where those donkeys were, but they needed someone who heard from God to find out where they were.

As these two young men were preparing to see Samuel, God speak to him about them. He told Samuel that they would be coming and that he was to anoint Saul as the first king of Israel.

In obedience to the word of the Lord, Samuel secretly anointed Saul, telling him that God had chosen him to be king (1 Samuel 9:27-10:1). To prove that what he said was from the Lord, Samuel told Saul what would happen as he returned home. When Samuel's prophecy came to pass, Saul would know that the word he spoke to him was true.

Samuel told Saul that when he left to return home, he would meet two men by Rachel's tomb. They would tell him that his father was anxious about him (1 Samuel 10:2). He would go on from there and come to the oak of Tabor. This time he would meet three men who were going to Bethel. One of these men would be carrying three young goats. The second would be carrying three loaves of bread. The third would be carrying a skin of wine. They would greet him and give him two loaves of bread. Samuel instructed Saul to accept these loaves (1 Samuel 10:3-4). Finally, Samuel told Saul that when he arrived at Gibeath-elohim, he would meet a group of prophets with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre. They could be prophesying (1 Samuel 10:5).

The details Samuel gives here are amazing. Samuel saw these events before they happened. He knew who Saul would meet on the way home. He knew what those he met would be carrying. He knew the type of instruments the prophets would be playing. Samuel knew the exact timing of Saul's trip. These details were revealed to him by God to confirm Saul in his calling to be king.

Samuel told Saul that when he met the prophets, the Spirit of the Lord would rush upon him and he would prophesy and be turned into another man.

*[6] Then the Spirit of the LORD will rush upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man. [7] Now when these signs meet you, do what your hand finds to do, for God is with you.*

The Spirit of God would be poured out on Saul to enable him to exercise the ministry he had been called to do.

It is important to notice that the prophets who met Saul carried musical instruments (see 1 Samuel 10:5). We saw in Exodus 15:20-21 that Miriam, the sister of Moses was a prophetess. As a prophetess, she took up a tambourine

and led the women of that day in a dance as she prophesied. This shows us that music and prophecy were connected. It may be that some of the prophets sang words they received from the Lord. As we continue this study we will see further connections between prophecy and music.

The day came for Saul to be officially proclaimed king of Israel. Samuel gathered the people to him at Mizpah. Notice what happened that day:

*[20] Then Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot. [21] He brought the tribe of Benjamin near by its clans, and the clan of the Matrites was taken by lot, and Saul, the son of Kish, was taken by lot. But when they sought him, he could not be found. [22] So they inquired again of the LORD, "Is there a man still to come?" and the LORD said, "Behold, he has hidden himself among the baggage." (1 Samuel 10)*

Saul hid when Samuel came to anoint him. To find him, Samuel asked the Lord if there was a specific man God had chosen. The Lord told him, before the people that the man he had chosen had hidden among some baggage. They went and found Saul and anointed him as Israel's first king. This prophetic revelation from God confirmed when they found Saul, was proof to the people that he was the Lord's choice. Again, the word given to Samuel was very specific and easily confirmed.

Samuel was an old man when Saul became king. Knowing that the time of his death was approaching, Samuel addressed the people and gave them what would be his final prophetic word for the nation. In this address, Samuel challenged the people to walk with the Lord. Listen to part of this challenge as recorded in 1 Samuel 12:

*[14] If you will fear the LORD and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the*

*LORD, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God, it will be well. [15] But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you and your king. (1 Samuel 12)*

In these words, Samuel told Israel that all would be well for them if they served the Lord and walked in obedience to Him. If, on the other hand, they rebelled against His commandments then the hand of the Lord would be against them. To show them that these words were from the Lord, Samuel asked God for a sign:

*[16] Now, therefore, stand still and see this great thing that the LORD will do before your eyes. [17] Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call upon the LORD, that he may send thunder and rain. And you shall know and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking for yourselves a king." [18] So Samuel called upon the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day, and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel. (1 Samuel 12)*

Samuel asked the Lord to send thunder and rain. God responded to that prayer and sent the thunder and rain. By this means the people knew that Samuel's words were from the Lord. The words of the prophet Samuel were often confirmed by an immediate sign from the Lord. This does not seem to be the case for all prophets, but in the case of Samuel, we do see a connection between his prophetic words and a miraculous sign from God to confirm his word.

In 1 Samuel 13, we see Samuel rebuking Saul for offering a sacrifice to God even though he was not king. He warned Saul that the day was coming when God would rip his kingdom from him and give it to another.

In 1 Samuel 15, Saul was commanded by God to fight the Amalekites. He was to destroy them and take nothing from their land. Saul only partially obeyed the Lord. He defeated the Amalekites but took their king hostage as well as a large quantity of sheep and cattle. The Lord sent Samuel with a word of rebuke for Saul:

*[22] And Samuel said,  
"Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and  
sacrifices,  
as in obeying the voice of the LORD?  
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,  
and to listen than the fat of rams.*

*[23] For rebellion is as the sin of divination,  
and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.  
Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,  
he has also rejected you from being king."* (1 Samuel 15)

In place of Saul, Samuel would anoint David as king (see 1 Samuel 16).

There is one more detail I would like to mention before concluding our look at prophecy in 1 Samuel. In 1 Samuel 28 we see that near the end of Saul's life after Samuel had died, he was no longer hearing from the Lord. It seemed that the presence of the Lord had withdrawn from him. This grieved Saul, and he wanted to know why God was no longer speaking to him. Samuel had given him this answer before he died when he told him that God had rejected him because he had rejected the word of the Lord (see 1 Samuel 15:23). Saul, however, seemed to have forgotten this word and needed to hear once again.

1 Samuel 28 recounts the story of how Saul, went to see a medium and asked her to bring up the spirit of Samuel so he could speak to him and know why the Lord was silent. The medium was successful in bringing up the spirit of Samuel. That day the spirit of Samuel spoke to Saul:



*[16] And Samuel said, "Why then do you ask me, since the LORD has turned from you and become your enemy? [17] The LORD has done to you as he spoke by me, for the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. [18] Because you did not obey the voice of the LORD and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek, therefore the LORD has done this thing to you this day. [19] Moreover, the LORD will give Israel also with you into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me. The LORD will give the army of Israel also into the hand of the Philistines." (1 Samuel 28)*

Samuel's spirit told Saul what he had already told him when he was alive –God had torn his kingdom from him and would give it to another. He reminded Saul that it was because he did not obey God's voice that this would happen to him. The spirit of Samuel told Saul that he and his sons would die the very next day.

It is important that we note here what the Law of God taught about consulting the dead through mediums:

*[10] There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer [11] or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, [12] for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD. And because of these abominations the LORD your God is driving them out before you. (Deuteronomy 18)*

God commanded that any kind of medium or anyone who inquired of the dead were an abomination in His sight. Saul was breaking the Law of God in consulting Samuel.

As we examine the life of Samuel, we see that he had to learn to listen to the voice of God. He initially confused the voice of God with the voice of Eli.

We see also that the young Samuel had to learn how to share what God gave him even when those words rebuked those he loved. This was a challenging part of the prophetic ministry. The prophet was sometimes required to speak words of judgment and condemnation.

In the case of Samuel, we see how God revealed precise details to him. Saul's return trip home after seeking his father's donkeys was shown in detail to Samuel. He saw where Saul was hiding because God told this to him. Prophecy reveals what is hidden and is sometimes used by God to uncover details that need to be exposed.

There were times in the ministry of Samuel that his message was confirmed by miraculous signs. Whether this was rain and thunder from heaven or confirmation by showing Saul what would happen when he returned home, these miraculous signs were proof of the truth he spoke from the Lord. While not all prophecy in Scripture is confirmed by immediate signs, there are clear examples of this in the ministry of Samuel.

Finally, we learn from 1 Samuel that mediums and diviners were able to connect with the spirits of the dead. Saul heard from Samuel's spirit that he would die the next day. That prophecy came to pass. There are people who can predict what is going to happen by consulting mediums and spirits of all sorts. Just because these prophecies come true, does not mean that we should consult them. The Word of God teaches believers are never to consult mediums, horoscopes or anything of this nature.

While God made it clear that the believer was not to consult the spirits of the dead or mediums of any kind, the Word of God is also clear that God demanded that His people listen to the prophets He sent. They were to make a clear distinction between the true prophet of God and those who consulted other spirits and gods. They were to

reject the false prophets but listen carefully to those who came from God.

For Consideration:

Samuel had to learn how to open his mind to the reality of God speaking and learn to discern His voice. Does God still speak today? How do we learn to listen?

Was the ministry of a prophet always an easy ministry? What was it about prophecy that was difficult? Is this a ministry that we should desire or take lightly?

What is the difference between true prophecy and occultic practices of consulting the spirits? What does the Law of God teach us about mediums?

How easy is it to reject prophecy because there are many counterfeits around us? What does God teach about the need to listen to those He sends. How do we distinguish true prophecy from false prophecy?

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to make you more sensitive to His leading and direction in your life. Thank Him that He wants to direct us.

Ask the Lord to give those He has called to a prophetic ministry the grace and strength to say what God tells them to say. Ask God to give us more people who will speak from God in our churches.

Do you know of individuals who have become involved in occulting practices? Ask the Lord to set them free from these ways.



## Chapter 7 - Prophecy Under the Reigns of David and Solomon

During the reigns of David and Solomon, Israel reached the peak of its glory and power. At this time, there is evidence of a number of prophets, but two names seem to stand out above the rest –Nathan and Gad.

### *Nathan*

Probably the best-known prophet of this period of Israel's history is a man by the name of Nathan. We first read about him in 2 Samuel 7:

*[7:1] Now when the king lived in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, [2] the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent." [3] And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you." (2 Samuel 7)*

From this passage, we see that David had a concern to build a temple for the worship of the Lord. We see him in 2 Samuel 7 speaking with Nathan the prophet about his desire. This leads us to believe that David had prophets close to him to advise him. Nathan appears to be one of these prophetic advisers.

Notice how Nathan advised David to do what was in his heart to do for the Lord because the Lord was with him. That night, however, the Lord spoke to Nathan and gave him a word for David. The Lord told Nathan that He was indeed with David (2 Samuel 7:15). A temple would also be built where his people would worship the name of their God. David, however, was not the man to build this temple. God's purpose for David was to bring rest to Israel from their enemies (2 Samuel 7:9-11). When David died, his son would build this temple for God (2 Samuel 7:12-13).

What is interesting to note here is that the advice of Nathan had to be corrected. Initially, Nathan told David to do whatever was on his heart. The Lord told him, however, that David was to leave this task of building the temple to his son. It may be that Nathan spoke from his own wisdom and understanding the first time. I am sure that this correction was something he had to learn from in his prophetic ministry. It was important for the prophet to seek the Lord and wait for His counsel. The temptation for the prophet was to speak his own mind.

We meet Nathan again in 2 Samuel 12. David had just committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband murdered in battle to cover up his sin. The Lord sent Nathan to rebuke David for this sin. Nathan's message to David is quite interesting. He brought him a case about a rich man and a poor man's sheep:

*[12:1] And the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. [2] The rich man had very many flocks and herds, [3] but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. [4] Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he*

*was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." (2 Samuel 12)*

When David heard this story, he was outraged and told Nathan that the rich man deserved to die. He was to restore four-fold all he had taken from the poor man. Nathan then went on to inform David that he was the rich man in the story. Although he had many wives, David took Uriah's only wife, Bathsheba, to satisfy his pleasure.

The prophecy of Nathan was hidden in a story that David could understand. Like the parables of Jesus, sometimes prophecies had hidden meanings that required interpretation. In this case, Nathan interpreted the story to David.

*[10] Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' [11] Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. [12] For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.'" (2 Samuel 12)*

Nathan told David that the rest of his days would be days of fighting. His battles would not just be with foreign enemies but with members of his own household. His own wives would be taken from him and given to a neighbour. That individual would have a sexual relationship with his wives before all Israel.

That prophecy would come true when David's own son would revolt against him and sleep with his father's concubines on the rooftop to make a public statement. Nathan also told David that the child born of the illegitimate relationship between him and Bathsheba would die. These



would have been difficult words for Nathan to speak to his king.

We see from 1 Kings 1 that when David's son Adonijah determined to make himself king near the end of David's reign, it was Nathan who counselled Bathsheba in what to do. He understood that it was the will of the Lord that Solomon be king and so he advised her to speak to David and urge him to proclaim Solomon, his successor.

Nathan was a trusted adviser to King David. As a prophet, he also spoke the word of the Lord to him. This word was sometimes harsh and rebuked the king, but Nathan faithfully shared what God had given him.

### *Gad*

The second important prophet during the reigns of David and Solomon was a man by the name of Gad. In 2 Samuel 24, David decided to take a census. This census was not commanded by God. It was an act of pride on David's part. Through this census, David discovered that he had about 1,300,000 fighting men. We can only imagine the sense of power that this brought David. The fact of the matter, however, was that the strength of Israel was not in the number of fighting men but in the Lord. David's eyes were taken away from this reality.

God was angry with David for turning from Him to his trust in his fighting men. He sent the prophet Gad to rebuke David for his pride. Gad told David that he had three options for his punishment.

1. Three years of famine in the land
2. Three months of fleeing from his enemies
3. Three days of pestilence

David chose three days of pestilence. The result was the death of 70,000 men in the nation. God reminded David that day that He could take every man he trusted in to do battle for him. He showed him just how fragile his trust in his army was.

Gad the prophet would then counsel David to set up an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah, the Jebusite (2 Samuel 24:18). When David obeyed, the pestilence ceased in the land, and God's blessing was restored. It was the counsel of Gad that got David through those days.

According to 2 Chronicles 29 Gad, like David had an interest in the music that took place in the worship of God:

*[25] And he stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, harps, and lyres, according to the commandment of David and of Gad the king's seer and of Nathan the prophet, for the commandment was from the LORD through his prophets. (2 Chronicles 29)*

Nathan and Gad were not the only prophets in those days. We read of at least three other men who exercised this ministry during the reign of David.

Zadok was a priest who helped David frustrate the plans of his enemy to kill him. It appears from 2 Samuel 15:27 that he was also a prophet:

*[27] The king also said to Zadok the priest, "Are you not a seer? Go back to the city in peace, with your two sons, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. (2 Samuel 15)*

1 Chronicles 25 introduces us to a man by the name of Heman:

*[5] All these were the sons of Heman the king's seer, according to the promise of God to exalt him, for God had*

*given Heman fourteen sons and three daughters. (1 Chronicles 25)*

Heman was, according to this verse the “king’s seer.” The Lord blessed Heman with many children. The passage goes on to say that Heman oversaw the music of the house of the Lord (1 Chronicles 25:6-7).

It is interesting to note that both Gad and Heman had responsibilities for the music in the worship of God. While it is not explicitly stated in these verses, their prophetic gifts may have been used through this music.

There is one more detail I would like to mention from 1 Chronicles 29:29:

*[29] Now the acts of King David, from first to last, are written in the Chronicles of Samuel the seer, and in the Chronicles of Nathan the prophet, and in the Chronicles of Gad the seer (1 Chronicles 29)*

Notice the use of the word seer and prophet in this verse. Samuel and Gad are described as seers, while Nathan is described as a prophet. Was there a difference between a seer and a prophet? Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown make the following statement in their commentary on 1 Samuel 9:9:

*The recognized distinction in the latter times was, that a seer was one who was favoured with visions from God—a view of things invisible to mortal sight and a prophet foretold future events. (Jamieson, Robert; Fausset, A.R.; Brown, David: Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, Notes on 1 Samuel 9:9, Laridian, 1871)*

According to this, the seer was one who could see what was invisible. Samuel saw the donkeys of Saul’s father safely at home, though he was far away. He also saw where Saul was hidden when he came to anoint him. The foretelling of future events was more the role of the

prophet. We should not focus on this distinction, however, for the use of the words seem to merge later in the history of Israel. We see this from 1 Samuel 9:9:

*[9] (Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he said, "Come, let us go to the seer," for today's "prophet" was formerly called a seer.)*

The lives of the prophets in the days of David and Solomon show us that they were called at times to act as advisers for they had the ability to hear from the Lord. There was a temptation for the prophets, however, to assume they knew God's will without first consulting Him. They were used by God to correct or rebuke His people. Their message was sometimes direct, but at other times it was hidden in stories or possibly even in music which needed to be interpreted and applied to a given situation. The prophetic ministry included both a revelation from God of present things that were hidden from human view or a foretelling of future events.

For Consideration:

Why would prophets be used as advisers to King David?

We see how Nathan assumed that he knew the will of the Lord about David and the construction of the house of the Lord. This had to be corrected. Is it possible for us to assume we know the will of the Lord without consulting Him? How important is it to seek the will of the Lord in the circumstances we face each day?

Why do you suppose God used stories or parables in His messages to His people?

What was the traditional difference between a seer and a prophet?

For Prayer:

King David used prophets to seek the will of the Lord. Ask God to help you to seek Him and His will for the situations you face each day.

Thank the Lord that He continues to guide and direct His people in our day. Ask God to forgive you for the times you have not sought His will in the details of your life.

Take a moment to confess that as a human being there are many things you cannot see. Thank the Lord that He is willing to direct you and show you what you need to know as you navigate through the obstacles of life.

## Chapter 8 - The Prophets of the Divided Kingdom

### *Ahijah*

Toward the end of his reign, King Solomon had many enemies. One of those enemies was a man by the name of Jeroboam. Jeroboam had not always been an enemy. In fact, he had gained the favour of the king who put him in charge of forced labour (1 Kings 11:28). One day, Jeroboam was leaving the city of Jerusalem when he was approached by a prophet whose name was Ahijah. Ahijah was dressed in a new garment. When they were alone, Ahijah took hold of his new garment and ripped it into twelve pieces. He told Jeroboam to take ten pieces for himself. He proceeded to prophecy saying that the day would come when the Lord would take the kingdom from Solomon and give Jeroboam the leadership of ten tribes:

*[29] And at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him on the road. Now Ahijah had dressed himself in a new garment, and the two of them were alone in the open country. [30] Then Ahijah laid hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. [31] And he said to Jeroboam, "Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes [32] (but he shall have one tribe, for the sake of my*

*servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel), (1 Kings 11).*

I am sure this was a surprise to Jeroboam, who likely had no such aspirations at that moment in time. The prophecy of Ahijah, however, would come to pass after Solomon's death, during the reign of his son Rehoboam. At this time, the kingdom of Israel would be divided into the Northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Jeroboam, as prophesied by Ahijah, would take ten of the tribes in the northern kingdom and lead them as their first king.

King Jeroboam would lead the nation of Israel into rebellion against God by establishing a new religion in Israel. In 1 Kings 14, we read how Jeroboam's son became seriously ill. He thought about the prophet Ahijah who had predicted his kingship. He told his wife to go to Ahijah and inquire about their son. Ahijah had terrible news for Jeroboam's wife. He said to her that God would bring harm to her husband. Every male descendant would be cut off (1 Kings 14:10). Their home would be burnt (1 Kings 14:10). There would be no burial for the bodies of Jeroboam's descendants (1 Kings 14:11). The child she had come to inquire about would die (1 Kings 14:12).

We only read about Ahijah in connection with Jeroboam. He was used of God to announce both the beginning and the end of Jeroboam's reign.

### *Shemaiah*

The king of the southern kingdom of Judah at that time was Solomon's son Rehoboam. When ten of the tribes were taken from him by Jeroboam, Rehoboam determined to engage him in battle to get these tribes back. Rehoboam assembled 180,000 warriors to face Jeroboam. As he

prepared for battle, the Lord God spoke to a prophet by the name of Shemaiah:

*[22] But the word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God: [23] "Say to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people, [24] 'Thus says the LORD, You shall not go up or fight against your relatives the people of Israel. Every man return to his home, for this thing is from me.'" So they listened to the word of the LORD and went home again, according to the word of the LORD. (1 Kings 12)*

Through the prophet Shemaiah, God stopped this battle.

As king of Judah, Rehoboam turned from the Lord. The result was that the Lord send an Egyptian army against him. The Egyptians defeated Judah and took several cities. The Lord sent the prophet Shemaiah to speak with him about this:

*[5] Then Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and to the princes of Judah, who had gathered at Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said to them, "Thus says the LORD, 'You abandoned me, so I have abandoned you to the hand of Shishak.'" (2 Chronicles 12)*

Shemaiah made it clear to Rehoboam that his rebellion against the Lord had grave consequences. When Rehoboam and his officers humbled themselves and repented, God sent Shemaiah back with another word:

*[7] When the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah: "They have humbled themselves. I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance, and my wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. [8] Nevertheless, they shall be servants to him, that they*



*may know my service and the service of the kingdoms of the countries.” (2 Chronicles 12)*

God chose to relent and give Rehoboam some relief from their oppression, but they would still be under the power of Egypt because of their sin.

Shemaiah seems to be the mouthpiece of God to Rehoboam in the southern kingdom of Judah. God to raise up prophets who would speak to the authorities of the nations. These prophets revealed the will of God to the kings of Israel and Judah.

### *Jehu*

In 1 Kings 16, God sent the prophet Jehu to speak with King Baasha of the northern kingdom of Israel. Like Jeroboam before him, Baasha rejected the Lord God and turned to idols. Jehu's words to Baasha were very similar to the word the prophet Ahijah spoke to Jeroboam's wife in 1 Kings 14:10-12.

*[16:1] And the word of the LORD came to Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha, saying, [2] “Since I exalted you out of the dust and made you leader over my people Israel, and you have walked in the way of Jeroboam and have made my people Israel to sin, provoking me to anger with their sins, [3] behold, I will utterly sweep away Baasha and his house, and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. [4] Anyone belonging to Baasha who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the field the birds of the heavens shall eat.” (1 Kings 16)*

Jehu speaks harsh words to the king telling him that God would sweep away his house. All who belonged to his family would either be eaten by dogs or the birds of the field.

We find Jehu again in 2 Chronicles 19:1-2 where he rebuked king Jehoshaphat for an alliance, he had made with evil King Ahab of Israel. That rebuke of Jehu seemed to change King Jehoshaphat who would go on to bring many reforms and restore the worship of God in the nation of Judah (see 2 Kings 19-20).

### *Azariah*

In 2 Chronicles 15, we have another example of religious reform that took place through the words of a prophet. Here in this chapter, we meet the prophet Azariah.

According to 2 Chronicles 14:9, Ethiopians attacked the nation of Judah. King Asa was successful in fending off this attack, and after this victory, the Lord sent the prophet Azariah with an encouraging word for King Asa.

*[15:1] The Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded, [2] and he went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: The LORD is with you while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you. (2 Chronicles 15)*

*[7] But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded." (2 Chronicles 15)*

Through Azariah, the Lord reminded Asa that if he served Him, all would go well for him. Azariah encouraged Asa to be strong for the work for the work of the Lord, and his efforts would be rewarded. Those words were a blessing and great encouragement to the king. When he heard them, he had all foreign idols removed from the land (2 Chronicles 15:8). He commanded that repairs be made to the altar of God (2 Chronicles 15:8). When those repairs were made, he sacrificed 700 oxen and 7,000 sheep to the Lord God of Judah. He then led the nation into a renewal

of their covenant with God, promising to serve Him alone. Anyone who refused to do so was put to death (2 Chronicles 15:13).

Clearly, Azariah would have been encouraged to see how the Lord used him to stir up the king in this way. While not all prophets saw the Lord work in this way, both Azariah and Jehu seemed to be used of God to stir His people to reform and renewal. They did this by warning and challenging the people of God.

### *Hanani*

In 2 Chronicles 16, there was trouble between King Baasha of Israel and King Asa of Judah. To deal with this, King Asa of Judah took the treasure from the temple of the Lord and paid the king of Syria to attack Israel. This action displeased the Lord. He sent a prophet by the name of Hanani to King Asa to speak with him.

*[7] At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him, "Because you relied on the king of Syria, and did not rely on the LORD your God, the army of the king of Syria has escaped you. [8] Were not the Ethiopians and the Libyans a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you relied on the LORD, he gave them into your hand. [9] For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. You have done foolishly in this, for from now on you will have wars." (2 Chronicles 16)*

God was angry with Asa because he did not seek Him but chose to look to Syria. Hanani prophesied that because Asa did not seek the Lord, he would experience wars for the rest of his reign. For daring to confront King Asa and tell him this news, Hanani was put in stocks (see 2

Chronicles 16:10). Hanani paid the price for obedience and sharing the word of the Lord. Those who shared the word of the Lord were not always appreciated.

### *Micaiah*

2 Chronicles 18 recounts the story of the marriage alliance that King Jehoshaphat of Judah made with the evil king Ahab of Israel. On one occasion, King Ahab asked Jehoshaphat to join him in a battle at Ramoth-gilead (see 2 Chronicles 18:3). Jehoshaphat felt it was important to consult the prophets before deciding about this battle. Ahab called on the prophets of Israel and sought their advice. All of them predicted that the campaign would be a success. Remember, however, that the nation of Israel had turned away from the Lord God and followed another religion. King Jehoshaphat, understood that these prophets were not seeking the will of his God, so he asked Ahab if there was a prophet of the God of Judah in the nation, they could consult

*[6] But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not here another prophet of the LORD of whom we may inquire?" (2 Chronicles 18)*

King Ahab brought Micaiah before them. Micaiah would ultimately prophesy that Ahab would perish in battle and the army would be scattered:

*[16] And he said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the LORD said, 'These have no master; let each return to his home in peace.'" (2 Chronicles 18)*

Despite this prophecy, King Ahab went to battle. To assure that he would not be recognised, however, he disguised himself. As the battle ensued, a man shot a random arrow which struck Ahab so that he died, fulfilling the words of

Micaiah (2 Chronicles 18:28-34). Micaiah was the only prophet among all who were summoned before Ahab and Jehoshaphat who spoke the word of the Lord. This was obviously a lonely place to be. God's true prophets sometimes stand alone with the Word of God. The false prophets of Ahab's day spoke what he wanted them to speak. They did not seek the heart of God for the people but told them what they wanted to hear.

### *Iddo*

2 Chronicles tells us about a seer or prophet by the name of Iddo. What we read about Iddo is particularly interesting. His ministry as prophet seemed to be exercised through writing books. The first record of him is found in 2 Chronicles 9:29:

*[29] Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, from first to last, are they not written in the history of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer concerning Jeroboam the son of Nebat? (2 Chronicles 9)*

Notice the reference to the "visions of Iddo the seer." These visions were written down in a book and related, in part, to the acts of Solomon. Apparently, the Lord communicated to Iddo through these visions which he wrote in a book that was available for people to read at that time.

Further reference to the writings of Iddo is found in 2 Chronicles 12:15:

*[15] Now the acts of Rehoboam, from first to last, are they not written in the chronicles of Shemaiah the prophet and of Iddo the seer? There were continual wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. (2 Chronicles 12)*

According to this verse, the acts of Rehoboam the son of Solomon were written in the chronicles of Iddo the Seer. Iddo, as a seer, recorded the events of the reign of Rehoboam in this written chronicle. Notice that Iddo was not the only one to write down his prophetic insights. Shemaiah also wrote down his prophetic words in a history of the life of Rehoboam.

The final reference to the writings of Iddo is found in 2 Chronicles 13:22:

*[22] The rest of the acts of Abijah, his ways and his sayings, are written in the story of the prophet Iddo. (2 Chronicles 13)*

The reference here is to the story of the prophet Iddo. In these three verses, the author mentions the visions of Iddo, the chronicles of Iddo, and the story of the prophet Iddo. There is no mention of Iddo speaking directly to anyone in the Scriptures. That is not to say that God didn't call him to speak directly to individuals. The focus of 2 Chronicles is in the writing of this prophet which seemed to be available to the people of his day. Not all prophets stand before crowds of people; God calls some to use the medium of books and writing to communicate His message.

### *The Man of God and the Old Prophet*

There is one final story we need to examine regarding the prophets of this period of Israel's history. 1 Kings 13 tells us about an unnamed prophet who confronted King Jeroboam of Israel who was offering pagan sacrifices on an altar in Bethel. Listen to the words of this unnamed prophet:

*[2] And the man cried against the altar by the word of the LORD and said, "O altar, altar, thus says the LORD:*

*'Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name, and he shall sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who make offerings on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.' [3] And he gave a sign the same day, saying, "This is the sign that the LORD has spoken: 'Behold, the altar shall be torn down, and the ashes that are on it shall be poured out.'" (1 Kings 13)*

In the days to come, a son by the name of Josiah would sacrifice the bones of the false priests of Israel. The altar on which this would take place would be torn down, and the ashes of these dead priests poured over it. The prophecy is very direct and even contains the name for the man who would fulfil it. That prophecy would be fulfilled many years later. The record of its fulfilment is found in 2 Kings 23:15-20.

The events of that day and the prophecy of this unnamed prophet were reported to another prophet who lived in Bethel. Hearing what had happened, this man found the unnamed prophet and asked him to come to his home. God specifically told the unnamed prophet that after sharing His word, he was not to eat or drink anything in that region. The man who invited him to his house, however, told him that he was also a prophet and that the Lord had told him to seek him out and bring him back to his home. 1 Kings 13:18 tells us clearly that this man lied to the prophet.

Deceived by the man, the unnamed prophet ate a meal with him, against the will of the Lord. As he returned home, he was killed by a lion for his disobedience to the word of the Lord (see 1 Kings 13:24).

The story is a powerful reminder to us of just how easy it is to take our eyes off the Lord. Even prophets can be deceived. The unnamed prophet listened to the old man and

was misled by the fact that he told him that the Lord had spoken to him.

As we examine the prophets of this period of history, we see how they were used of God to confront those who were straying from His purpose. They also revealed why things were happening in their land.

We can be sure that the enemy will cause a great struggle for those who are the true prophets of God. We see how Hanani was put in stocks for sharing what God gave him to share. Micaiah stood alone against the numerous prophets of Israel.

We also see the battle that raged for truth. Micaiah alone stood for the truth, but other prophets stood against that truth and told a lie. The unnamed prophet of 1 Kings 13 was approached by the old man who lied to him in the name of God. The enemy will sow confusion and lies to distract the people of God from the truth God wants to proclaim. Prophets who stand up for the truth of God must also stand firm against the attacks of the enemy to distract, confuse and deceive.

In these days of the divided kingdom, Satan was very much alive. He had his prophets lie and distract. God, also, however, was working through His servants countering those lies with the truth of His purpose. Many were deceived by the false prophets. God, however, continued to speak through His servants. All who discerned His voice and walked in obedience knew his blessing and favour.

For Consideration:

Look at the messages the prophets of this period proclaimed. Was it easy to preach these messages? What



does this tell us about the difficulty in the ministry of the prophet?

What was the response of the people to the messages of the prophets of this period of Israel's history? Was their response always positive?

What evidence do we have of the attacks of Satan and his false prophets in this chapter? How does this make it more difficult to discern the truth?

Iddo seemed to exercise his prophetic gifting through writing. Are there writers today who speak prophetically to our culture?

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord for the men and women of Scripture who risked everything to communicate the truth of God? Ask God for greater courage to stand up for that truth in our day?

Ask God for discernment to distinguish truth from error. Ask Him to expose the false prophets of our day.

The story of the old man and the unnamed prophet of 1 Kings 13 shows us how easy it is to be deceived. Ask God to protect you from such deception. Take a moment to pray for those who have been deceived by false prophets in our day. Ask God to open their eyes to the truth.



## Chapter 9 - Elijah

Probably one of the best-known prophets in the early years of the divided kingdom was a man by the name of Elijah. As a prophet, Elijah ministered primarily in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. At the time of his ministry, Ahab and his wife Jezebel were on the throne. They were responsible for great evil in the land. 1 Kings 16 describes the reign of Ahab:

*[30] And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. [31] And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him. [32] He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. [33] And Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. (1 Kings 16)*

As king of Israel, Ahab promoted the worship of Baal in Israel. Verse 33 tells us that he did more to provoke the anger of the Lord than all the kings before him. The days in which Elijah ministered were evil days in Israel.

We first meet Elijah in 1 Kings 17. As 1 Kings 17 begins, Elijah is speaking to King Ahab

*[17:1] Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before*

*whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."*

Through Elijah, the Lord warned King Ahab of a drought that was going to come to the land. This drought was very likely the result of the spiritual climate at the time and part of the judgement of God on His people.

Knowing what the response of the king would be to the message of Elijah, God told the prophet to hide by the brook Cherith where H would use the ravens to feed him. At that brook, Elijah would also have water to drink. As the Lord said, the drought came to Israel and even the small stream at Cherith dried up because there was no rain (1 Kings 17:7).

When the brook at Cherith dried up, the Lord told Elijah to go to the region of Zarephath where he would find a widow to care for him. The widow God chose to provide for Elijah was living with her son, and when Elijah met her, she was gathering a few sticks to prepare her last meal (1 Kings 17:12). When Elijah asked her for something to eat and drink, she explained her situation. Elijah told her, however, to make a cake for him and promised that her jugs of oil and flour would not be used up until the day the Lord sent rain on the earth. 1 Kings 17:15-16 describe the fulfilment of Elijah's prophecy:

*[15] And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. [16] The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah. (1 Kings 17)*

In time, the widow's son became sick and died. Elijah cried out to the Lord on his behalf, and the Lord restored his life. For the widow, this was a clear sign that Elijah was a true prophet of God.

*[23] And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son lives." [24] And the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth." (1 Kings 17)*

The ministry of Elijah seems to be filled with miraculous events and occurrences. Through Elijah, the Lord revealed His power to the nation of Israel in a time of spiritual decline.

Elijah, through the foremost of the prophets of his day, was not the only prophet. In fact, 1 Kings 18:3-4 tell us that Ahab and his wife Jezebel were killing the prophets of God in Israel. A man by the name of Obadiah is credited with hiding one hundred of these servants of God to keep them from being killed:

*[3] And Ahab called Obadiah, who was over the household. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly, [4] and when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water.) (1 Kings 18)*

While the prophets of God were being sought out and killed, the prophets of Baal were numerous in Israel. To demonstrate the power of God over the prophets of Baal, Elijah set up an encounter with them on Mount Carmel. As he stood before the people gathered on Mount Carmel, Elijah spoke:

*[21] And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word. (1 Kings 18)*

As the people listened, Elijah called for two bulls to be laid on an altar. The prophets of Baal would prepare one, and he would prepare the other. Four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal were present that day. Elijah told them that they were to call on their god, asking him to send fire from heaven to consume their offering. He would do the same. The God who responded was the true God. The prophets of Baal agreed to this sign.

The prophets of Baal cried out from morning until evening, cutting themselves with knives to get the attention of their god but there was no fire from heaven. When Elijah's turn came, he built his altar and had water poured over the offering until it ran down the altar and filled a trench he had dug beside it. When all these preparations were in place, Elijah called out to the Lord, and the Lord rained fire from heaven consuming not only the offering but the wood, stones, and water as well. By this means, Elijah demonstrated that the God of Israel was the one true God. He then called for the false prophets of Baal to be slaughtered.

This incident did not win Elijah favour with Ahab and Jezebel. Jezebel was very angry with Elijah and swore to kill him within the day.

*[2] Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow."  
(1 Kings 19)*

After this event, the Lord gave Elijah an assistant by the name of Elisha. Elisha would follow Elijah wherever he went, learning from him and assisting him in his ministry (see 1 Kings 19:19-21).

In 1 Kings 21, King Ahab spotted a piece of property that he wanted to use as a vegetable garden. The property belonged to a man by the name of Naboth. Naboth refused to exchange the property for one the king offered in

exchange, claiming that it had belonged to his family for many years. When the king informed his wife Jezebel of what had happened, she was angry and immediately set out to obtain this property. She hired two false witnesses to claim that Naboth had blasphemed the king and God. She then had Naboth stoned for this false charge and seized his property (1 Kings 21:1-16).

Even though Ahab and Jezebel were seeking to kill him, the Lord sent Elijah with a message for the king and his wife:

*[21] Behold, I will bring disaster upon you. I will utterly burn you up, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. [22] And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the anger to which you have provoked me, and because you have made Israel to sin. [23] And of Jezebel the LORD also said, 'The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel.' [24] Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the open country the birds of the heavens shall eat."* (1 Kings 21)

These were very harsh words, but they hit their mark. The result was that King Ahab repented of his actions and humbled himself before God.

*[27] And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly. [28] And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, [29] "Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son's days I will bring the disaster upon his house."*

God chose to spare Ahab of the disaster He had planned for him.



When Ahab died, Ahaziah became king in his place. As a result of a fall, the king lay sick. Wondering if he was going to recover from this fall, Ahaziah sent messengers to inquire of the god Baal-zebub whether he would get well again. Elijah met these messengers on their way to consult this pagan god.

The Lord told Elijah to ask these messengers why Ahaziah was consulting Baal-zebub and not the Lord God of Israel. The prophet went on to say that because Ahaziah had chosen Baal-zebub rather than God, he would never recover from his illness (see 2 Kings 1:3-4).

The messengers returned with this word for Ahaziah, explaining that they had met a prophet on their way to consult Baal-zebub. When the messengers described the prophet, who had given them this message, the king identified him as Elijah. Ahaziah sent 50 men to search for Elijah, demanding that he present himself before him. Elijah's response to these 50 soldiers, however, was not what they expected:

*[10] But Elijah answered the captain of fifty, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. (2 Kings 1)*

The king sent another fifty men making the same demand of the prophet. These men met with the same fate. (2 Kings 1:11-12). The captain of the third group of fifty had another approach:

*[13] Again the king sent the captain of a third fifty with his fifty. And the third captain of fifty went up and came and fell on his knees before Elijah and entreated him, "O man of God, please let my life, and the life of these fifty servants of yours, be precious in your sight. [14] Behold, fire came down from heaven and consumed the two former*

*captains of fifty men with their fifties, but now let my life be precious in your sight.” (2 Kings 1)*

This time the Lord told Elijah to follow these men to Ahaziah. There before the king, the prophet Elijah spoke the word of God announcing the death of the king. Ahaziah died just as Elijah prophesied.

The account of the final days of Elijah is as spectacular as his ministry.

*[11] And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. (2 Kings 2)*

2 Kings 2:11 tells us that Elijah went to heaven in a whirlwind accompanied by chariots and horses of fire.

What characterised the ministry of Elijah were these miraculous signs. God used this man to raise the dead, bring down fire from heaven and miraculously provide food for a widow and her son. He was fed by ravens and ascended to heaven in a chariot of fire. His prophetic ministry was accompanied by miraculous signs. He not only spoke the word of God but demonstrated the power of God to a society that had completely turned its back on the faith of their fathers.

He was prone to discouragement and lived a good part of life in hiding. His life was not an easy one. Despite the mighty signs given to him by God, he was often rejected. He felt alone and left this life without seeing great results for his efforts. He was a faithful servant who demonstrated, in a remarkable way, the reality and power of God in a pagan world.

### For Consideration:

What characterized the prophetic ministry of Elijah? How was his ministry different from some of the prophets we have examined so far?

What did God accomplish through the miraculous signs He gave Elijah? How did these signs demonstrate the power of Elijah's God?

How would you describe the faith and courage of Elijah? Do you have this kind of faith and courage?

### Prayer:

While God may not use us all in the way He used Elijah, ask the Lord to make His power and presence known through your life.

Ask God to give you more of the courage of Elijah who often had to stand alone against the forces of evil in his day.

Every ministry is unique. Ask God to help you to walk in tune with Him and what He has for you and your ministry.

Ask God to enable you to be open to reaching your full potential for Him.



## Chapter 10 - Elisha

Before the prophet Elijah went to be with the Lord, he was told to anoint his successor –a man by the name of Elisha:

*[16] And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. (1 Kings 19)*

Elisha was ploughing with twelve yoked oxen in front of him when the prophet Elijah found him. This shows us the Elisha was a cultivator of the ground. The Tyndale Bible Dictionary has this to say about the 12 yoked oxen:

*Elisha's use of 12 yokes of oxen in his agricultural work has been taken as a sign that he was wealthy, for normally two yoked oxen would have been handled by one person (Comfort, Philip W., Elwell, Walter A, "Elisha" Tyndale Bible Dictionary, Cedar Rapids: Laridian, Electronic edition formatted for Pocket Bible)*

When Elijah saw Elisha, "cast his cloak upon him." This symbolic act showed Elisha that God had called him to follow Elijah and become a prophet. Elisha accepted this calling, said goodbye to his parents, sacrificed his oxen, and shared the meat with the people in his neighbourhood. After this, he followed Elijah (see 1 Kings 19:19-21).

We learn something about Elisha in 2 Kings 2. Just before he went to be with the Lord, Elijah asked his disciple if

there was anything he could do for him. Listen to Elisha's response in 2 Kings 2:9:

*[9] When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me." [10] And he said, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so." (2 Kings 2)*

There is an incredible boldness in this request. In the last chapter, we saw how Elijah was a prophet known for the many signs and wonders he performed. Elisha was asking for a double portion of his master's spirit. Despite the boldness of the request, the prophet Elijah granted him this favour.

The first evidence of his power as a prophet is seen when Elisha took Elijah's cloak and struck the waters of the Jordan with it. The water parted, allowing him to cross over on dry land into the city of Jericho:

*[13] And he took up the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. [14] Then he took the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over. (2 Kings 2)*

This would be the first of many recorded miraculous signs that Elisha would perform during his ministry. While he was in Jericho, the people of the city complained to him about the bad water and unproductive land. Elisha had them bring him a bowl of salt. Throwing salt into a spring of water, he declared: "Thus says the LORD, I have healed this water; from now on neither death nor miscarriage shall

come from it." (2 Kings 2:21). From that point on the water was healed (2 Kings 2:22).

We learn something else about Elisha in 2 Kings 2:23. From this verse, we learn that he was bald. In fact, as he was traveling to Bethel, he was met by some small boys who mocked him because of his bald head.

*[23] He went up from there to Bethel, and while he was going up on the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, "Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!" (2 Kings 2)*

Elisha cursed these young boys, and the result was that two she-bears came out of the woods and attacked them. 2 Kings 2:24 tells us that there were 42 boys who were attacked by those bears that day. His position as prophet demanded respect, and when these young boys mocked him, they suffered the judgement of God for their words.

2 Kings 3 tells us about Elisha's encounter with both the kings of Israel and Judah. Under King Ahab, Israel had an alliance with Moab. When Ahab died, however, Moab rebelled against Israel. At that time Israel asked for support from Judah. King Jehoshaphat of Judah agreed to support him in a battle against Moab. Together with the nation of Edom, this coalition army marched for three days without water. The situation became desperate for them, and they wondered what they were to do. King Jehoshaphat asked if there was a prophet of the Lord they could consult. When he was informed that Elisha was in the region, all three kings went down to see him.

When Elisha saw the king of Israel he said:

*[13] ... "What have I to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and to the prophets of your mother." (2 Kings 3)*



Elisha knew that the nation of Israel had rebelled against the Lord and no longer served Him. He was not interested in speaking to the King of Israel because of his rebellious heart. In fact, Elisha told the king of Israel that were it not for the presence of King Jehoshaphat with him, he would not even see him:

*[14] And Elisha said, "As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, were it not that I have regard for Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would neither look at you nor see you. (2 Kings 3)*

Out of respect for Jehoshaphat, however, Elisha agreed to consult the Lord on their behalf. Notice in this the boldness of Elisha to speak to the King of Israel in this way.

In his attempt to hear from the Lord, Elisha called for a musician. It was as the musician played that the word of the Lord came to him. The Lord told Elisha that while there would be no rain, the dry streambeds would be full of water enough for them and their animals to drink (2 Kings 3:15-17). He also told the kings that the Lord would give them victory over the Moabites, but they were to destroy everything. They were to chop down the trees in the region of Moab, stop up all the springs of water and ruin every good piece of land with stones. Just as Elisha had predicted, the very next day, a great flood of water filled the region. The three kings would go on to defeat Moab as Elisha told them.

It is interesting to note the use of music and its connection with the prophecy of Elisha. While we do have instances in Scripture where prophecy was put to music, it does not appear that this is the case here. The music seems to be a means of preparing Elisha's heart and mind to receive a word from the Lord. It may have been that the music played was a worshipful type of music that helped him to get his heart in tune with God, or it may have been a piece

of music that calmed his heart and mind to enable him to hear from God. Even the prophets of God had to deal with distractions before they could hear from the Lord. In the case, Elisha found that music was helpful to clear his mind enough to hear from God.

Elisha was not the only prophet in those days. In 2 Kings 2:7, 15 we read of fifty "sons of the prophets." It appears that these "sons of the prophets" were a group of prophets who gathered to hear from God. We read about these groups in several Old Testament passages (see 1 Samuel 10:5; 1 Kings 18:3-4; 2 Kings 2:7, 15; 2 Kings 4:38; 2 Kings 6:1).

From 2 Kings 4, we learn that the wife of one of these prophets came to Elisha for support when her husband died. It appears that their creditors had come to take her two children as slaves to work off her debt. She had nothing left in her house but a jar of oil. Elisha told her to borrow as many jar vessels from her neighbours as she could. She was to shut the door of her house and pour the contents of her jar into these vessels. When she obeyed, she found that she filled every container she had borrowed with oil from that one jar. Elisha then told her to sell the oil and pay off her debts.

Also, in 2 Kings 4, we meet a rich Shunammite woman who offered a room to Elisha whenever he was in the region. Wanting to repay her for her kindness, Elisha prophesied that she would have a son. As prophesied, the woman conceived and bore a son. When that son died, Elisha was called upon to raise him from the dead (see 2 Kings 4:8-37).

On one occasion, the sons of the prophets gathered around Elisha. Elisha called his servant and asked him to make a large pot of stew for them to eat. The servant went out into the fields and picked herbs and wild gourds.

Among the food gathered that day was a poisonous vine. This was only discovered when the men were eating the stew. Elisha called for some flour to be added to the pot of stew and the poison was neutralised, so no harm came to the prophets (see 2 Kings 4:38-41). The context seems to indicate that this was a miracle from God.

On another occasion, a man came to Elisha bringing an offering of twenty loaves of barley and some ears of grain. Elisha told the servant to offer it to the sons of the prophets. The servant responded in disbelief saying: "How can I set this before a hundred men?" (2 Kings 2:43). When Elisha insisted, however, the servant obeyed:

*[44] So he set it before them. And they ate and had some left, according to the word of the LORD. (2 Kings 4)*

The food was multiplied so that everyone had what they needed and there was more left over.

2 Kings 5 recounts the story of a Syrian military commander by the name of Naaman who went to Elisha to be healed of his leprosy. Elisha told him to bathe seven times in the Jordan River. When Naaman reluctantly obeyed he was cured of his disease.

According to 2 Kings 6:1 Elisha had several prophets under his charge:

*[6:1] Now the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, "See, the place where we dwell under your charge is too small for us. (2 Kings 6)*

These prophets seemed to be living in a common home, but the home became too small for them, so the men asked Elisha for permission to build a larger dwelling. As they were doing so, one man lost a borrowed axe head when it fell into the water. Elisha cut a stick and threw it in the water, and the axe head came to the surface of the

water. This was again a sign of the miraculous power that God had given him as a prophet (see 2 Kings 6:1-7).

It is important for us to note here how the prophets of Elijah's day were gathering together in groups. These gatherings became known as the "schools of the prophets" and were established to train men in the prophetic ministry. Commenting on these schools of the prophets M.G. Easton says:

*Colleges, "schools of the prophets," were instituted for the training of prophets, who were constituted, a distinct order (1Sa 19:18-24; 2Ki 2:3,15; 4:38), which continued to the close of the Old Testament. Such "schools" were established at Ramah, Bethel, Gilgal, Gibeah, and Jericho. The "sons" or "disciples" of the prophets were young men (2Ki 5:22; 9:1,4) who lived together at these different "schools" (4:38-41). These young men were taught not only the rudiments of secular knowledge, but they were brought up to exercise the office of prophet, "to preach pure morality and the heart-felt worship of Jehovah, and to act along and co-ordinately with the priesthood and monarchy in guiding the state aright and checking all attempts at illegality and tyranny." (Easton, M.G. Easton's Bible Dictionary, "Prophet" L A R I D I A N: Cedar Rapids, Iowa, electronic edition formatted for Pocket Bible).*

Elisha was involved in teaching at these schools and preparing the next generation of prophets to preach and share God's heart.

During the days of Elisha, there was an ongoing problem between Israel and the nation of Syria. Elisha played a vital role in the battle between these two nations. According to 2 Kings 6:8-10 the Lord would show Elisha where the Syrians were camping. He would pass this information to the king of Israel so that he would not fall into the Syrian trap. The king of Syria concluded that there was a traitor in his

camp who was passing on information to the king of Israel. He was informed, however, that it was Elisha who was telling the king what he spoke in secret:

*[12] And one of his servants said, "None, my Lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom." (2 Kings 6)*

This angered the king of Syria who determined to seize Elisha so he could not pass on this information. The Syrians surrounded the city where Elisha and his servant were sleeping. When the servant woke up and saw the army, he was afraid and asked Elisha what they were to do. Elisha prayed for his servant and asked God to open his eyes. When the Lord opened the servant's eyes, he saw chariots of fire surrounding them. The Lord was protecting them. Elisha, as a prophet, saw what his servant could not see. He had been given a spiritual sight that saw the spiritual reality around him.

When the Syrian army approached, Elisha asked God to blind them. He then led them to the city of Samaria, the capital city of Israel. Their eyes were opened the moment they arrived in Samaria, and they saw they had fallen into a trap.

Elisha told the king of Israel to set bread before the Syrians and feed them. He was not to kill them. This act of charity had such an impact on the Syrians that they retreated.

In 1 Kings 6:24, Ben-Hadad of Syria surrounded the city of Samaria with his army. This resulted in a severe famine in Samaria. The seriousness of this famine came to light when the king of Israel spoke with two mothers at the wall of the city:

*[28] And the king asked her, "What is your trouble?" She answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give your son, that*

*we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.'*  
[29] *So we boiled my son and ate him. And on the next day I said to her, 'Give your son, that we may eat him.'*  
*But she has hidden her son."* [30] *When the king heard the words of the woman, he tore his clothes—now he was passing by on the wall—and the people looked, and behold, he had sackcloth beneath on his body— [31] and he said, "May God do so to me and more also, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat remains on his shoulders today."* (2 Kings 6)

Mothers were forced to eat their own children to survive. The king was so angered by these conditions that he swore to kill Elisha (2 Kings 6:31). Elisha, however, prophesied that the next day the famine would be over, and the nation would feast in abundance. That prophecy came true when that night the Lord caused the Syrians to hear the sound of chariots. They fled in fear, leaving everything behind (see 2 Kings 7).

While the Syrians left Samaria, they continued to be a burden to the nation of Israel. On one occasion, King Joash approached Elisha with his deep concern about the threat Syria was posing for his country. We read in 2 Kings 13:14 that Elisha was sick at this time and about ready to die. Laying his hand on the king's hand, Elisha asked him to take his bow shoot an arrow out the window. As he prepared to shoot his arrow, the prophet told King Joash to strike the ground with the arrow to indicate the level of victory he would have over the Syrians. When the king hit the ground three times, Elisha told him that he would have three victories over Syria, but he would not totally defeat them (see 2 Kings 13:15-19). These would be the last words of Elisha the prophet but not his miraculous deeds.

After Elisha was buried, bands of Moabites invaded the land. They interrupted a funeral service and those carrying the man had to throw his body into the grave of Elisha,

presumably because they needed to defend themselves or flee for their lives. 2 Kings 13:21 tells us that when the body of the dead man touched the bones of Elisha, life was given to him and he was revived and stood on his feet. What is interesting about this is that this shows that the power for the miracles was not in Elisha but in God. Even when there was no life left in his body, the power of God was still at work.

As a prophet in Israel, Elisha had no formal training. He was likely a farmer by occupation until he was called by God. Elisha followed the footsteps of Elijah and was known for his miraculous deeds. These deeds pointed people to the power of God to minister to them in their daily needs. Elisha was influential in the lives of the kings of Israel. He directed them and revealed the purpose of God for victory over both the Moabites and the Syrians.

Elisha's influence was not only felt by the general Israelite community, but he was also involved in the schools of the prophets and ministered to the next generation of prophets who would continue when he was gone. As a prophet, Elisha was given the ability to see into the spiritual realm. He saw what no one else saw. We don't have a record of lengthy prophecies by Elisha. The words of other prophets in Scripture were written in books. This is not the case with Elisha. He spoke to his day but more than that, he demonstrated the power of God to a people who were wandering from Him.

Not all prophets minister in the same way. Moses as a prophet acted as a law-giver, communicating and instructing people in the ways of the Lord. Samuel seemed to function more like a priest and is often seen making sacrifices and anointing God's servants. Iddo, the prophet, wrote the history of the nation from a prophetic perspective. Elijah and Elisha demonstrated the miraculous power of God through their ministry. All these prophets heard

from God but exercised their ministry in different ways. It is crucial then that we not try to define the ministry of the prophet too tightly. There seems to be a great diversity in personality and ministry style among the prophets of Scripture.

For Consideration:

Elisha, following in the footsteps of his mentor Elijah, was known for his miracles. What connection did these miracles have to the prophetic ministry of Elisha? How did these miracles demonstrate who God was and His heart for His people?

When mocked by the young boys about being bald, Elisha cursed them. The Lord responded by sending a bear to maul the boys. How did that act demonstrate the importance of respecting the servants of God?

What role did music have in the prophetic ministry of Elisha? How did music contribute to his ministry?

What was the school of the prophets? What role did Elisha play in these schools?

How did Elisha's ministry differ from the ministries of other prophets in Scripture?



### For Prayer:

Thank the Lord that He personalises His gifts and calling. You may have a similar spiritual gift or calling as someone else, but the outworking of that gift and calling will be very different. Ask the Lord to show you how He wants you to serve Him with the gifts He has given you. Ask the Lord to forgive you for times when you have tried to imitate someone else's ministry.

Elisha was involved in a ministry of equipping the next generation for the prophetic ministry. Ask the Lord to help you to have an influence on the next generation after you. Ask Him to show you how you can exhort and encourage those who will follow in your steps.

## Chapter 11 - Jonah

Probably one of the most famous prophets of the Old Testament is a man by the name of Jonah. The first record we have of him is found in 2 Kings 14:25. Speaking about King Jeroboam II, we read:

*[25] He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher. (2 Kings 14)*

While we do not have a written record of this prophecy in Scripture, it appears that Jonah prophesied that the border of Israel would be restored. It is clear from this verse that Jeroboam II fulfilled this prophecy of Jonah.

From 2 Kings 14:23 we understand that Jeroboam II became king in Israel in the fifteenth year of Amaziah, the son of Joash of Judah:

*[23] In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, began to reign in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years. (2 Kings 14)*

The prophet Elisha died during the reign of Amaziah's father Joash (see 2 Kings 13:14). This would place Jonah's ministry somewhere around the time of Elisha.

We also learn from 2 Kings 14:25 that Jonah lived in Gath-hepher. This was a town located a few kilometres north of Nazareth and east of Bethlehem.

2 Kings give us a sense of the days in which Jonah lived. When Elisha the prophet ended his ministry, the people of God were facing serious problems with the Syrians.

*[22] Now Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. (2 Kings 13)*

This was not the only conflict that raged in those days. According to 2 Kings 14:11-14, King Jehoash of Israel determined to wage war against Judah. A battle took place in Beth-shemesh in Judah. Judah was defeated by Israel, and Jehoash broke down the wall of Jerusalem and plundered the temple, stripping it of gold, silver, and vessels used in the service of the Lord. He took hostages from Judah with him on his return to Samaria, the capital of Israel.

As for King Amaziah, he would ultimately be assassinated by his own people after fleeing Jerusalem from a plot to kill him:

*[17] Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, lived fifteen years after the death of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel. [18] Now the rest of the deeds of Amaziah, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? [19] And they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish. But they sent after him to Lachish and put him to death there. (2 Kings 14)*

2 Kings 14:26 describes the days in which Jonah likely lived in the following words:

*[26] For the LORD saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter, for there was none left, bond or free, and there was none to help Israel. (2 Kings 14)*

These were difficult days for the people of God.

It was in this setting that the word of the Lord came to the prophet Jonah, asking him to leave Gath-hepher and go to Nineveh for the purpose of speaking out against the evil of the city. Nineveh was the principal city of the Assyrians at this time and located about 1,000 kilometres (600 miles) from Gath-hepher where Jonah lived. This was a significant distance for Jonah to travel in those days. Jonah's response to that call of God is recorded in Jonah 1:3:

*[3] But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD. (Jonah 1)*

The prophet rebelled against the call of God and chose instead to travel to Joppa where he boarded a ship headed for Tarshish. Most Bible commentators believe that Tarshish was in present-day Spain, which was in the opposite direction to Nineveh. The attempt of Jonah here is to run as far away from the call of God as possible.

God pursued Jonah, and a great storm blew against that ship. Coming to realize that the cause of this storm was the rebellious heart of Jonah, the sailors reluctantly throw him overboard to save their lives (Jonah 1:7-15). The wind stopped the moment Jonah was thrown into the sea. The sailors were so touched by this that Jonah 1:16 tells us that they "feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows."

The Lord used Jonah in his rebellion to touch the lives of these sailors. There on the ship, they came to fear the Lord God of Israel. We are not told what vows they made that day, but we can only imagine that some of those vows related to honouring the God of Israel when they returned home. Their lives would never be the same after meeting

Jonah. Jonah's heart was rebellious. He was living in disobedience to the Lord, but the Lord used him to touch these sailors in a powerful way.

The Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah and for three days he lay in the belly of that fish. After three days, the fish spit up Jonah on dry land. Again, it is vital that we understand what is happening here. Listen to what the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 12:39-40:

*[39] But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. [40] For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (Matthew 12)*

Jesus used the story of Jonah in the belly of the fish to illustrate what would happen to Him. Jonah was cast into the sea to save the lives of the sailors on the ship. The Lord Jesus would suffer death to save His people from sin. Jonah would remain three days in the belly of the fish. The Lord Jesus would remain three days in the darkness of the tomb. After three days Jonah was released from the belly of the fish when it vomited him up on dry land. The Lord Jesus would also be released from the tomb after three days when He rose from the dead.

Even as Jonah was running away, the Lord God was using him. The time Jonah spent in the belly of the fish was prophetic in nature. He was living out a prophecy about the Lord Jesus and how He would die, be buried and rise again from the dead. I don't think Jonah was aware of what God was doing. He had not seen the sailors bow down to God when he was thrown overboard. He was not likely aware of how the belly of the fish was a prophetic picture of the Messiah's work. God was using Jonah in powerful ways, without him knowing it.

When God renewed His call to Jonah to go to Nineveh, this time Jonah determined he would go. The entire message of Jonah to the people of Nineveh is summarized in eight words: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (Jonah 3:4).

The results of those words, however, were powerful. Jonah 3:6 shows us the response of the people of Nineveh to his message:

*[5] And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. [6] The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. [7] And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, [8] but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. [9] Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish." (Jonah 3)*

What is particularly interesting is the response of Jonah to the revival that broke out that day in Nineveh:

*[4:1] But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. [2] And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. [3] Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." (Jonah 4)*

Jonah was "exceedingly displeased" and "angry" with the Lord. He told God that the reason he did not want to go to

Nineveh in the first place was that he knew God would forgive its inhabitants. He did not want God to forgive them. In fact, his anger with God over this matter was so great, Jonah asked God to take his life. He told God that he would rather die than see the people of Nineveh receive the mercy and compassion of God.

Notice the rebellion and prejudice of Jonah. He hated the people of Nineveh. He wanted to see them perish. The last thing in the world he wanted to see was that they come to His God. Despite this great hatred in his heart, God used Jonah's message that day to bring an entire city to its knees in repentance.

The life of Jonah teaches us several lessons about the prophetic ministry. Consider first, the difficulty of the ministry. God asked Jonah to do something he did not want to do. In fact, it was the last thing in the world he wanted to do. He asked him to go where Jonah did not want to go. Those who are called to be prophets are called to surrender everything to the Lord. They are to go and say what God wants them to say, even when that message clashes with their own ideas and desires. The prophetic ministry is not an easy one. The word God asks the prophet to speak is not always an easy word to share. True prophets of God, however, will die to their own ideas and go where God calls them to go and say what He tells them to say, even when it makes them uncomfortable.

Second, the power of the prophetic ministry is not in the person but in God and His word. Jonah is a clear example of this. His ministry is characterized by rebellion against God. We can hardly attribute his success in preaching to his level of maturity in faith. His attitudes were wrong. His heart was not in the right place. God worked through Jonah, despite his attitude. Jonah reluctantly confessed his sin to the sailors on the ship, and this resulted in them bowing down in worship of his God. He lay helplessly in the

belly of the fish, but God used it to illustrate the work of the Messiah to come. He preached a very bitter and angry message in Nineveh and God brought repentance and revival in the city. The power of Jonah's ministry was in God and God alone. Even the word preached with anger accomplished God's purpose. This is not an excuse for the prophet to live in rebellion, but it is a reminder for us not to exalt the prophet but to recognize the Lord in his or her words.

Third, notice the evangelistic thrust to the prophetic ministry of Jonah. The sailors on the ship came to know about the God of Israel and bowed down to Him. The people of Nineveh repented and cried out to the God of Israel. Even the time Jonah spent in the belly of the fish spoke of a Saviour who would die on behalf of His people, spend three days in the tomb and be resurrected. This is the message of the gospel. Jonah spoke to unbelievers, and God used his prophetic ministry to bring these unbelievers to Himself.

We see the great diversity in the prophetic ministry. Prophets speak the word of God, but they do so in many ways and to many different people. Jonah was a reluctant prophetic evangelist, speaking to unbelievers about the Saviour and their need to repent.

#### For Consideration:

What were the conditions in Israel and Judah when Jonah was a prophet? Why do you suppose God sent Jonah to a foreign country when the conditions in his homeland were so needy? What does this teach us about missions and the call of God on the life of a missionary?



How did God use Jonah's rebellion to speak to those with whom he came into contact? What was the reason for Jonah's effective ministry? Why do we look so much at the instrument God uses rather than to God?

How is Jonah's time in the belly of the fish a prophetic statement about the coming Messiah?

Jonah's prophetic ministry seemed to have an evangelistic focus. What does this teach us about prophecy? Does God still send prophets to the unbeliever today?

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to help you to be more sensitive to His leading and not on your human understanding. Thank Him that He has a purpose for your life. Ask Him to show you what He has for you to do.

Thank the Lord for a time when He worked out His purpose in your life even when you failed Him. Thank Him that He is in control.

Ask the Lord to forgive you for times when you took glory due to Him for yourself. Thank the Lord that He is the

source of our success in ministry. Thank Him for the way He wants to empower and use you.

Ask the Lord to give you a heart that is wholly surrendered to Him so that you are willing to go where He wants you to go and speak what He wants you to say.



## Chapter 12 - Amos

The prophet Amos likely ministered just after the time of Jonah. From Amos 1:1 we read:

*[1] The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.  
(Amos 1)*

Notice that Amos lived during the reign of King Uzziah of Judah and King Jeroboam II of Israel in the region of Tekoa, a community about 10 kilometres (6 miles) south-east of Bethlehem. We also learn that Amos was a shepherd by profession. Further details about the prophet are revealed in Amos 7:1-2:

*[14] Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, "I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. [15] But the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'" (Amos 7)*

It appears that Amos cared for sycamore figs. While he had no training as a prophet, the Lord called him away from his flock to speak to His people.

To understand the ministry of the prophet Amos, we need to understand the times in which he lived. Jeroboam II was king in the northern kingdom of Israel. He did evil in the

sight of the Lord, but Jonah had prophesied that prosperity would still come to Israel:

*[24] And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin. [25] He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher. [26] For the LORD saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter, for there was none left, bond or free, and there was none to help Israel. (2 Kings 14)*

Jeroboam II, through his military campaigns, restored land that had been taken from them and there is evidence of great prosperity in Israel in his days. The Tyndale Bible commentary says this about the reign of Jeroboam II who reigned from the capital of Samaria in Israel:

*The archaeological evidence at Samaria indicates a reconstruction program in the royal palace during the prosperous reigns of Joash and Jeroboam II. In 1910 excavators found over 60 inscribed potsherds that were invoices or labels for oil and wine sent to the royal stores for use in the king's service...These illustrate the extensive holdings and opulence of the royal house in Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II.*

*Large numbers of carved decorative plaques and panels of ivory were also found in the ruins of Samaria, a reminder of the wealth of the northern kingdom in its latter days. The influence of the pagan societies of Syria, Assyria, and Egypt can be seen by the various figures of deities on the ivories...*

*The northern kingdom reached its greatest extension since the time of Solomon as the result of God's care for Israel during Jeroboam's reign. The boundaries stretched*

*from Hamath on the Orontes River in the north to the Gulf of Aqaba, with its cities of Elath and Ezion-geber, in the south. (Comfort, Philip W., Elwell, Walter A., ed. Tyndale Bible Dictionary, "Jeroboam," Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Laridian, electronic edition, formatted for Pocket Bible)*

In the southern kingdom of Judah, King Uzziah reigned. King Uzziah was also known as Azariah. Unlike Jeroboam II, King Uzziah was a good king who served the Lord (2 Kings 15:3). From 2 Chronicles 26:5 we learn that if he sought the Lord, he prospered:

*[5] He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God, and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper. (2 Chronicles 26)*

2 Chronicles 26 indicate that there was great prosperity in Judah during the days of Uzziah. The Lord gave him victories over the Philistines. He would even build cities in the Philistine territory (verse 6). He had victory also over the Arabians and the Meunites (verse 7). The Ammonites paid tribute to Uzziah (verse 8). He fortified Jerusalem by building defence towers (verse 9). He built cisterns for water (verse 10). He had a large and powerful army (verse 11) and even invented and constructed military weapons for the defence of his nation (verse 15). 2 Chronicles 26:15 tells us that "his fame spread far."

When he was prosperous and famous, Uzziah became proud and turned from the Lord. He died as a leper as a result of his pride (see 2 Chronicles 26:19-21).

The days in which Amos lived were days of prosperity. They were, however, not days of faithfulness to God. Jeroboam II, though prosperous, turned his back on the Lord God. King Uzziah, began his ministry as a good king but prosperity and fame caused him to wander from God. This

prosperity and pride created a variety of social problems that needed to be addressed by Amos.

In the first two chapters of the book of Amos, the prophet has a word from the Lord for the nations surrounding Israel and Judah. He rebukes the country of Syria because they oppressed Gilead (1:3). He expressed the anger of the Lord against Gaza for how they took people from their homeland and carried them into exile (1:6). He reminded the leadership of Tyre of how they delivered their neighbours into the hands of Edom (1:9). He reprimanded Edom because they pursued their brother without pity (1:11). He chastised the Ammonites for ripping open pregnant women in Gilead (1:13). Finally, he condemned the Moabites for burning the bones of the king of Edom (2:1). Amos is angered by the injustice, cruelty, and oppression of these nations.

Amos rebuked the nation of Judah and Israel for rejecting the law of God and in Amos 2:6-8 lists a series of crimes that were being committed in Israel:

*[6] Thus says the LORD:*

*“For three transgressions of Israel,  
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment,  
because they sell the righteous for silver,  
and the needy for a pair of sandals—*

*[7] those who trample the head of the poor into the dust  
of the earth*

*and turn aside the way of the afflicted;  
a man and his father go into the same girl  
so that my holy name is profaned;*

*[8] they lay themselves down beside every altar  
on garments taken in pledge,  
and in the house of their God they drink  
the wine of those who have been fined. (Amos 2)*

Notice the injustice and oppression that broke the heart of God. Israel sold the needy into bondage and slavery to enrich the pockets of the wealthy. The poor of the nation were being trampled in the dust. Sexual immorality was rampant in the land. Amos lamented the fact that God's people accumulated wealth by means of violence and robbery:

[10] *"They do not know how to do right," declares the LORD,  
"those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds." (Amos 3)*

In his anger toward the women of Israel, Amos addressed them as cows of Bashan. Bashan was a fertile and prosperous plain in the nation of Israel. Listen to what Amos had to say to these women:

[1] *"Hear this word, you cows of Bashan,  
who are on the mountain of Samaria,  
who oppress the poor, who crush the needy,  
who say to your husbands, 'Bring, that we may drink!'  
(Amos 4)*

The picture here is of ladies who spent their time in luxury at the expense of the poor and needy. They demanded that their husband provide them with the good things of life. The needy were being crushed to provide for the cravings of these insensitive and proud women.

Amos pleaded with the people of Israel to seek the Lord and live (5:6). He begged them to turn from injustice to a life of righteousness

[7] *O you who turn justice to wormwood  
and cast down righteousness to the earth! (Amos 5)*

The prophet defines this injustice in Amos 5:10-12:

[10] *They hate him who reproves in the gate,  
and they abhor him who speaks the truth.*



*[11] Therefore because you trample on the poor  
and you exact taxes of grain from him,  
you have built houses of hewn stone,  
but you shall not dwell in them;  
you have planted pleasant vineyards,  
but you shall not drink their wine.*

*[12] For I know how many are your transgressions  
and how great are your sins—  
you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe,  
and turn aside the needy in the gate. (Amos 5)*

The people of Amos' day hated those who spoke the truth about God's requirements. They wanted to enrich themselves. The god of materialism had captured their hearts. They trample on the poor by demanding heavy taxes. They took bribes and refused justice to the needy because they could not pay them. Amos reminded these Israelites that God would turn His back on them because of this injustice:

*[21] "I hate, I despise your feasts,  
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.*

*[22] Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and  
grain offerings,  
I will not accept them;  
and the peace offerings of your fattened animals,  
I will not look upon them.*

*[23] Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.*

*[24] But let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5)*

God would no longer accept their offerings. He described their worship songs as a "noise" in His ears. Their only way they could again experience His blessing and favour was if they "let justice roll down like waters." In other words, they would have to repent of their injustice and treat their citizens with the respect they deserved. They would have

to stop oppressing them and reach out instead in compassion and mercy to them in their need.

Amos has some strong words to say to the oppressive rich in his nation. Notice that he describes them as “those who are at ease in Zion” (6:1). These individuals lived the easy life and had no worries –they felt secure on the mountain of Samaria (6:1). Amos reminded them, however, that there was cause for worry. Other men as rich and prosperous as they, had fallen under the wrath of God (6:2). They were rich, oppressive and violent but enjoyed the good life:

*[4] “Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory  
and stretch themselves out on their couches,  
and eat lambs from the flock  
and calves from the midst of the stall,*

*[5] who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp  
and like David invent for themselves instruments of music,*

*[6] who drink wine in bowls  
and anoint themselves with the finest oils,  
but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! (Amos 6)*

These rich people slept in fancy beds, stuffed their faces with delightful food, sang songs, anointed themselves with the finest oils, and drank wine by the bowl. They had no concern for the injustice around them. Their only concern was for themselves and their prosperity. Amos reminded these people that they would be the first to go into exile when the judgement of God fell (see Amos 6:7).

It is easy to see what the prosperity of the day was doing to the people. They enjoyed their riches. In fact, their possessions had become gods to them. They wanted more and more and greedily took from others to make their life more comfortable. Amos speaks out strongly against the injustice of his day. As a simple shepherd, he understood

the needs of the poor. He felt their pain and the injustice done to them.

In Amos 3:7 we read:

*[7] "For the Lord GOD does nothing  
without revealing his secret  
to his servants the prophets. (Amos 3)*

God does not punish without giving a warning to His people. He sends His prophets to bring a warning of coming judgement. He gives His people every opportunity to repent before pronouncing His sentence. God sent Amos to rebuke the people of Israel for the injustice and oppression in their land. In Amos 7 God also gave his servant three visions that showed him what would happen in Israel because of their sin and rebellion.

The first vision was a vision of locusts that came when the crop was just beginning to sprout. These locusts destroyed the crop and left nothing for the people to eat (see Amos 7:1-2). God was showing Amos that He was going to remove the blessings of the land and leave them destitute.

The second vision was a vision of fire that devoured the land. Again, God was showing Amos what would happen to the land of Israel. It would be left destitute and stripped of its blessing (see Amos 7:4).

In the final vision, the Lord gave Amos a picture of a wall with a plumb line to measure how straight the wall was. God told Amos that He was going to set the plumb line against the wall of Israel to determine if they were straight. In other words, God was going to evaluate the nation of Israel against the standard of His law to see if they followed His purpose. The result was that the land would be found guilty and laid waste (Amos 7:9). These visions reminded the people of God that their oppression and injustice would not go unpunished.

To show Amos how soon this judgement would come, the Lord gave him another picture in Amos 8:1:

*[8:1] This is what the Lord GOD showed me: behold, a basket of summer fruit. [2] And he said, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A basket of summer fruit." Then the LORD said to me,*

*"The end has come upon my people Israel;  
I will never again pass by them. (Amos 8:1)*

The word for summer fruit is the Hebrew word "qayis." After showing Amos the summer fruit (qayis), God went on to tell him that Israel's end had come. The Hebrew word for end is the word "qēs." The word for summer fruit and the word for "end" sound quite similar. This has led some commentators to say that God is using a play on words here. What is clear is that the Lord was showing Amos that the day of judgement was drawing near for the people of Israel.

The message Amos delivered to the people of Israel about injustice and oppression was not well received. In fact, Amaziah the priest sent word to the king that Amos had conspired against him. According to Amaziah, the "land could not bear his words":

*10] Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words. (Amos 7)*

The words of Amos were rejected by the religious leaders of his day.

As Amos concludes his prophecy, he reminded the people of Israel that while their punishment would be severe, God would not forget them. The day would come when blessing would be restored, and the fortunes of Israel would be replenished (see Amos 9:11-14).

As a prophet, Amos ministered at a time of great prosperity in Israel and Judah. That prosperity had captured the hearts of God's people. The result was a lust for power, luxury, and comfort at the expense of the poorest in the land. Amos cried out against this injustice. He reminded people of their responsibility to support the helpless and needy in their society. Amos was concerned for social justice and warned his people that they were accountable to God for how they treated even the lowest person in society. He shared with his people God's heart for the poor and needy.

For Consideration:

What evidence do we have in the book of Amos that the prosperity of the nations of Israel and Judah had become a curse in their countries?

Compare the ministry of Jonah with that of Amos. How did God use Jonah? What burden did He give to Amos? What does this teach us about the prophetic ministry? Are all prophets the same? Do all prophets have the same burden and focus?

What would Amos have to say to your society today? What injustice would he find and speak out against?

For Prayer:

What burden has the Lord given you? Ask Him to help you to communicate that burden with those who need to hear.

Take a moment to pray about the injustice in our world today. Ask the Lord to raise up men and women to speak to this injustice. Ask God to raise up people to do something about the injustice in our nations.

Thank the Lord that He takes a personal interest in the hardships we face. If you are experiencing this right now, ask the Lord to reveal His heart for you in your suffering and pain.



## Chapter 13 - Hosea

Hosea the prophet lived around the time of Amos and likely ministered from the northern kingdom of Israel. Evidence of this is found in the first verse of his prophecy:

*[1] The word of the LORD that came to Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. (Hosea 1)*

Notice that Hosea prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah. A quick look at the reigns of these kings show us the following:

King	Length of Reign	Passage
Uzziah	52 years	2 Chronicles 26:3
Jotham	17 years	2 Chronicles 27:1
Ahaz	16 years	2 Chronicles 28:1
Hezekiah	29 years	2 Chronicles 29:1

From the beginning of Uzziah's reign to the death of Hezekiah there is a span of 114 years. It was during the reign of Jotham that Amos died, so Hosea's ministry began during the time of Amos but continued after Amos had died. It is likely that Hosea started his ministry toward the end of the reign of Uzziah and finished at the beginning of Hezekiah's reign.

The other important detail we need to understand from verse 1 is that it was during the reign of Hezekiah of Judah



that the Assyrians would invade Israel and take them captive. Hosea was one of the last prophets in Israel to speak to the people before this invasion of Assyria and the loss of their land.

While not stated in the book, we believe that Hosea lived in the northern kingdom of Israel. Support for this idea is found in his prophecy which seems to speak primarily to the northern kingdom of Israel. While Hosea does occasionally speak to the southern kingdom of Judah during the reigns mentioned above, much of his message is focused on Israel. To appreciate fully the ministry of Hosea, it may be helpful for us to consider what was taking place at this time in the northern kingdom of Israel.

Jeroboam II led the northern kingdom of Israel into prosperity and expansion that was unparalleled since the time of Solomon. Jonah prophesied about this expansion in 2 Kings 14:25. The wealth of Israel, however, led its citizens to become proud and turn from God. God led Amos to speak to them about this pride and the social injustice that resulted from it. The blessing of God would ultimately be removed from Israel and the years that followed Jeroboam II would be years of tremendous confusion.

Jeroboam's son Zechariah would come to power after the death of his father. He continued to promote his father's evil ways. According to 2 Kings 15:8 he would only reign in Israel for six months before he was assassinated by Shallum, who took his place on the throne.

Shallum's reign was even shorter than that of Zechariah. 2 Kings 15:13 tells us that he was king for only one month before he was assassinated by Menahem.

Menahem took the throne after killing Shallum. He reigned for ten years in the capital of Samaria. To guarantee his continued rule, however, Menahem had to pay tribute to

the Assyrians. 2 Kings 15:20 tells us where he obtained the money necessary to pay this tribute:

*[20] Menahem exacted the money from Israel, that is, from all the wealthy men, fifty shekels of silver from every man, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back and did not stay there in the land. (2 Kings 15)*

While Menahem was able to pay Assyria to remain in power, it is clear that Israel was subject to the Assyrians and was fearful of what they might do if that money was not paid.

When Menahem died, Pekakiah, his son sat on the throne. He reigned two years before Pekah conspired against him and assassinated him in Samaria (see 2 Kings 15:23-26).

After assassinating Pekakiah, Pekah took the throne in Israel. Pekah reigned for twenty years in Israel. During his reign, however, the Assyrians invaded the land of Israel and captured many cities (see 2 Kings 15:29). The nation was growing weaker and smaller with each Assyrian invasion. Eventually, a conspiracy rose up against Pekah and Hoshea assassinated him and took his place on the throne (2 Kings 15:30).

Hoshea reigned 9 years in Israel. Like Pekah before him, however, he was not able to shake off the Assyrian threat. When Assyria attacked and demanded tribute from him, Hoshea sought the help of Egypt and refused to pay the tribute Assyria demanded. When his rebellion was discovered, the Assyrians captured him and put him in prison. These Assyrians then invaded Samaria and oppressed it for three years before eventually taking its citizens into captivity.

We can see from this that the days in which Hosea prophesied were difficult for Israel. Of the six kings, who reigned after Jeroboam II, four were assassinated, and one was

captured and imprisoned by the Assyrians. There was tremendous political confusion. The nation of Israel was under constant threat from Assyria and paid a regular tribute to maintain peace. This resulted in the wealth of the land being stripped away and its people's freedom limited. It was into this political and religious climate that God sent His prophet Hosea.

The prophecy of Hosea begins with a command from the Lord to the prophet:

### Hosea's Wife and Children

*[2] When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." (Hosea 1)*

God commanded Hosea to marry a "wife of whoredom," he was to find a wife who lived an immoral lifestyle and who would not be faithful to him. While this appears to be strange, as it is contrary to the desire of God for any marriage, there was a clear purpose in this command of God. Hosea 1:1 gives us that reason when it says: "for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." Hosea's marriage to this wife would be a symbol to the people of how they were treating God. When Israel saw Hosea and his wife, they would see a picture of themselves and their own unfaithfulness.

Hosea took a wife by the name of Gomer. They would have three children. The Lord gave Hosea the names he was to give these children. The first male child was to be called Jezreel meaning God will scatter (see Hosea 1:4-5). The second child was a daughter. God told Hosea to call her "No Mercy" because He would no longer show mercy and compassion to His people (see Hosea 1:6-7). The

third child was a son given the name “Not My People” because God had ceased to see these people as His (see Hosea 1:8-9).

What is essential for us to see here is how God not only called Hosea to speak His words to the people of Israel but also to demonstrate the truth he was communicating to them by how he lived. As we continue in our reflection of the prophetic ministry in Scripture, we will see that not all prophecy is spoken. God sometimes communicates his message in visual ways through His servants. In this case, Hosea's family life was a powerful illustration of how God saw Israel.

In chapter 3, we discover that Gomer was living with another man. God called Hosea to go to the home where she was living and take her back. This was to illustrate the incredible mercy and forgiveness of God for His people. Just as Hosea took his unfaithful wife back, so God would restore His unfaithful people to Himself. This would not have been an easy thing for Hosea to do. His life with Gomer was a difficult one. She betrayed him and hurt him deeply. This, however, was the cost of serving the Lord and being a prophet. Many desire a prophetic ministry but not all have counted the cost.

While Hosea lived out his prophetic message, God also called him to speak to the people and bring them His word. Let's take a moment to examine that message under four main headings.

### *Accusation of God*

Through His servant Hosea, God reminded His people of their rebellion and unfaithfulness. Listen to what Hosea told the Israelites in chapter 4:

*[1] Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel,  
for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of  
the land.*

*There is no faithfulness or steadfast love,  
and no knowledge of God in the land;*

*[2] there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and com-  
mitting adultery;  
they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.  
(Hosea 4)*

There are some strong accusations in these two verses. As God looks on the land of Israel, He finds no faithfulness, love or acknowledgement of God. Instead, all He saw was swearing, lying, murder, stealing, adultery, lawlessness, and bloodshed. This was a nation that was guilty of great sin and rebellion.

While Israel did not acknowledge her Creator God, she did acknowledge other gods. Hosea would confront her idolatry in chapter 4 when he said:

*[12] My people inquire of a piece of wood,  
and their walking staff gives them oracles.  
For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray,  
and they have left their God to play the whore.  
[13] They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains  
and burn offerings on the hills,  
under oak, poplar, and terebinth,  
because their shade is good.  
Therefore your daughters play the whore,  
and your brides commit adultery. (Hosea 4)*

God accused His people of being a “whore.” The sin of whoredom, however, was much deeper than this. In Hosea 5:4 Hosea told the people that they were trapped by a spirit of whoredom to the point that they could not return to God or even escape this sinful lifestyle of rebellion against God.

*[4] Their deeds do not permit them  
to return to their God.*

*For the spirit of whoredom is within them,  
and they know not the LORD. (Hosea 8)*

According to Hosea 8:14, their rebellion against God was so great that they had completely forgotten Him. He no longer even entered their thoughts:

*[14] For Israel has forgotten his Maker  
and built palaces,  
and Judah has multiplied fortified cities;  
so I will send a fire upon his cities,  
and it shall devour her strongholds. (Hosea 8)*

Hosea's language reflects the life he experienced with his wife. She played the whore and lusted after other men. He spoke with the pain of a husband whose wife no longer loved him and chose other men before him.

### *Desire of God*

God's people had been accused of great unfaithfulness. That did not mean that God no longer loved them, however. In fact, through Hosea, the Lord communicated the intensity of His love and devotion for His people. This is what made their rebellion so difficult. God still loved them with deep and unbreakable love.

God would judge His people because of their sin, but there was a purpose in this judgement. Listen to the words of God through Hosea in chapter 5:

*[14] For I will be like a lion to Ephraim,  
and like a young lion to the house of Judah.  
I, even I, will tear and go away;  
I will carry off, and no one shall rescue.  
[15] I will return again to my place,*

*until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face,  
and in their distress earnestly seek me. (Hosea 5)*

God promised that He would punish His people for their sin and whoredom but notice in Hosea 5:15 that His desire was that this punishment would force them to “acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me.” It was the profound desire of God that Israel seek His face. Notice that he wants them to “earnestly seek” him in verse 15. He wanted them to love Him and seek Him passionately.

God’s desire was not just for service and devotion but for His people to truly love Him:

*[6] For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,  
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. (Hosea 8)*

Though His people had wandered from Him and found other lovers, it was the desire of God to redeem them and bring them back to Himself:

*[13] Woe to them, for they have strayed from me!  
Destruction to them, for they have rebelled against me!  
I would redeem them,  
but they speak lies against me. (Hosea 7)*

You can sense the broken heart of God in these words: “I would redeem them, but they speak lies against me.”

The depth of God’s love for His people can be seen in Hosea 9 when He said:

*[10] Like grapes in the wilderness,  
I found Israel.  
Like the first fruit on the fig tree  
in its first season,  
I saw your fathers.  
But they came to Baal-peor*

*and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame,  
and became detestable like the thing they loved. (Hosea  
9)*

God compares finding Israel to a person wandering through a hot desert discovering a beautiful cluster of ripe and juicy grapes. He describes the thrill of meeting Israel to a farmer who sees the first fruits growing on a young fig tree in its very first season. There is excitement and joy in these illustrations. They show us the passion of God toward His people. He is thrilled by them and overwhelmed with love and compassion for them.

Hosea 11 describes God's relationship with Israel as a young child:

*[11:1] When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
and out of Egypt I called my son.  
[2] The more they were called,  
the more they went away;  
they kept sacrificing to the Baals  
and burning offerings to idols.  
[3] Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk;  
I took them up by their arms,  
but they did not know that I healed them.  
[4] I led them with cords of kindness,  
with the bands of love,  
and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on  
their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them. (Hosea  
11)*

As a father, the Lord God loved His son Ephraim. He taught him to walk, healed his wounds when he fell, fed him, and led him with kindness and love. Verse 2, however, describes this father calling out to this young child to come back to him but "the more they were called, the more they went away." The heart of the Father is deeply grieved watching the child he taught to walk, walk away from him.



Hosea reminds his people that the Lord God had deep compassion and love for them. Their wandering and whoredom grieved Him and He longed to have them return to Him and be blessed. God would, in fact, ask Hosea to take his own wandering wife, Gomer, back and love her as God loved His people (Hosea 3:1). The prophet was to illustrate this incredible love and forgiveness of God by forgiving and loving his own rebellious wife.

### *Judgement of God*

While God's love for His people was beyond question, as a holy God, He would punish her for her sin and rebellion. Hosea was sent to warn his people of this coming judgement of God. Through Hosea, the Lord God pleaded with His people to put away her whoredom and return to him:

[2] *"Plead with your mother, plead—  
for she is not my wife,  
and I am not her husband—  
that she put away her whoring from her face,  
and her adultery from between her breasts;  
[3] lest I strip her naked  
and make her as in the day she was born,  
and make her like a wilderness,  
and make her like a parched land,  
and kill her with thirst. (Hosea 2)*

Through Hosea, God warns Israel that if she did not return to Him, He would strip her naked and make her land like a parched wilderness. That prophecy would be fulfilled as the Assyrians marched against Samaria, destroying its buildings, removing its wealth and leading its inhabitants into captivity.

Everything would be taken from these unfaithful people of God.

*[3] Therefore the land mourns,  
and all who dwell in it languish,  
and also the beasts of the field  
and the birds of the heavens, and even the fish of the sea  
are taken away. (Hosea 4)*

They would be swallowed up by the nations:

*[8] Israel is swallowed up;  
already they are among the nations  
as a useless vessel.  
[9] For they have gone up to Assyria,  
a wild donkey wandering alone;  
Ephraim has hired lovers. (Hosea 8)*

Hosea prophesied that the nation of Assyria would take Israel as captives. They would eat “unclean food in Assyria” (see Hosea 9:3). These words would not have been easy for the prophet to proclaim. God’s people, however, knew the threat of Assyria and understood that the prophecy could very quickly become a reality.

### *Promise of God*

There is one final detail we need to examine in the prophecy of Hosea. While God promised to judge His people, He also reassured them that He had not given up on them. God promised that there was a day coming when they would be restored in their relationship with Him:

*[18] And I will make for them a covenant on that day with  
the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the  
creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow,  
the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie  
down in safety. (Hosea 2)*

God would abolish the bow and sword, and His people would live securely, free from all enemies. The day would

come when His exiled children would be restored to their land:

*[10] They shall go after the LORD;  
he will roar like a lion;  
when he roars,  
his children shall come trembling from the west;  
[11] they shall come trembling like birds from Egypt,  
and like doves from the land of Assyria,  
and I will return them to their homes, declares the LORD.  
(Hosea 11)*

Notice that as Israel returned, she would return like trembling birds and doves from the land of Assyria. This is a picture of humility and repentance. They would not return the same as they left. The work of God would be accomplished in them, and they would return a different people. They went in pride but would return in humility. They left as rebellious whores but returned as a loving and devoted wife of God.

God promised through Hosea that he would redeem His people from death:

*[14] I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol;  
I shall redeem them from Death.  
O Death, where are your plagues?  
O Sheol, where is your sting?  
Compassion is hidden from my eyes. (Hosea 13)*

Not only would God redeem His people from death, but He also promised to heal and restore their blessing:

*[4] I will heal their apostasy;  
I will love them freely,  
for my anger has turned from them.  
[5] I will be like the dew to Israel;  
he shall blossom like the lily;  
he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon;*

*[6] his shoots shall spread out;  
his beauty shall be like the olive,  
and his fragrance like Lebanon. (Hosea 14)*

God would heal their rebellious heart and turn His great anger from Israel. He would love them freely (generously and with great extravagance). He would once again pour out His blessing on them and make them a great nation under Him.

Hosea spoke of a God who longed for more than acts of service from a people whose heart was elsewhere. He challenged the people of God to walk in deeper intimacy with God. Just as Hosea grieved the unfaithfulness of his wife, so God grieved over the unfaithfulness of his people. Just as Hosea longed to be truly loved by his wife, so God was grieved by the divided heart of His people.

Hosea spoke to a people who had lost sight of God and His beauty. He challenged a people whose wandering heart looked longingly to other gods. He longed to see God's people restored to intimacy with God. As he looked around him, he saw a people who had become distracted. Their relationship with God was in heartless dutiful sacrifices and mindless celebrations. Their hearts were not in love with God. There was no passion for God, but they delighted in other things. Here were people who needed a powerful touch of God. Here was a nation whose whoring hearts and entrapped them so that they could no longer return to God. Only the grace and mercy of God could forgive and restore them. Only the reviving power of God's Spirit could renew them. Hosea's own marriage reflected in a powerful way the message he preached. Hosea's great concern as a prophet was that God's people experience deep intimacy with God.

For Consideration:

Is prophecy spoken in words only? How did the marriage of Hosea and Gomer speak prophetically to the people of Israel?

What was the spiritual condition of the people of Israel at the time of Hosea? How does this compare to the spiritual climate in your society today?

What does the prophecy of Hosea teach us about the desire of the Lord for a close and personal relationship with His people? How would you describe your relationship with God?

How was that judgement of God proof of His intense love for His people? What was the intention of God in judging His people?

God promised that He would heal the apostasy of His people and give them a new heart? What does this show us about our inability to heal ourselves? What needs to be healed in your life? Are you able to trust God for this healing?

For Prayer:

Take a moment to thank the Lord for the depth of passion He has for you.

Ask the Lord to show you if there is anything that keeps you from a deeper intimacy with Him. Ask Him to heal that area of your life and restore you to a right relationship.

Thank the Lord for servants like Hosea who are willing to serve Him at great personal cost. Ask the Lord to give you the grace to surrender to Him and His purpose like Hosea.

Thank the Lord for the passion of Hosea to preach about a God whose love for us is very passionate and intense. Ask the Lord to renew His people so that they find great delight in Him once again.



## Chapter 14 - Isaiah

Unlike Hosea, who ministered in the northern kingdom of Israel, Isaiah appears to minister in the southern kingdom of Judah. This is evident in the opening verse of the prophecy:

*[1] The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. (Isaiah 1)*

The prophecy of Isaiah, according to this verse, was “concerning Judah and Jerusalem.” While God would also use Isaiah to speak to several nations, the primary focus of his ministry would be the nation of Judah.

Verse 1 gives us more information about the prophet. We see that his father’s name was Amoz. The Bible does not give us any details about Amoz. We also understand that the prophet ministered during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. This places him at the time of Hosea (see Hosea 1:1). The period between the beginning of Uzziah’s reign and the death of Hezekiah is about 114 years. As in the case of Hosea, it is likely that Isaiah began his ministry in the final years of Uzziah. Some historians estimate that Isaiah would have prophesied for over 60 years. Isaiah’s name means, “the salvation of Jehovah.”

Isaiah was married. We do not have a record of his wife’s name. She is referred to in Isaiah 8:3 as the “prophetess.”



This may be because she, like her husband, had prophetic gifting or simply because she was married to a prophet. We know from the book that Isaiah and his wife had two sons. Both sons were given names that bore a prophetic significance.

In Isaiah 7:3 we read:

*[3] And the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-Jeshua your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer's Field. (Isaiah 7)*

According to this verse, Isaiah's first son was named Shear-jashub. This name means "a remnant shall return." The name foretold the future of God's people. They would be punished for their sins and sent into exile, but God would not abandon them. A remnant would return to their homeland and rebuild the ruins of the city.

We read about Isaiah's second son in Isaiah 8:3-4:

*[3] And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the LORD said to me, "Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz; [4] for before the boy knows how to cry 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria." (Isaiah 8)*

Isaiah's second son was named Maher-shalal-hash-baz. This name means, "swift to plunder, quick to spoil." It prophesied of the invasion of the northern kingdom by Assyria and how they would plunder and spoil the city of Samaria. It was also a warning to the southern kingdom of Judah of what could happen to them if they did not turn to the Lord.

Isaiah began his ministry in the final years of Uzziah king of Judah. While Uzziah had started his reign as a faithful servant of God, his prosperity and success made him very

proud. 2 Chronicles 26 says this about the king in the final years of his reign:

*[16] But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. (2 Chronicles 26)*

Notice the phrase, "he grew proud, to his destruction." Judgement for the pride of Uzziah came in the form of leprosy (see 2 Chronicles 27:20-21). As a leper, King Uzziah live in isolation as a leper while his son Jotham governed the land on his behalf. Uzziah would die as a leper in rebellion against God.

*[21] And King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death, and being a leper lived in a separate house, for he was excluded from the house of the LORD. And Jotham his son was over the king's household, governing the people of the land. (2 Chronicles 26)*

The nation of Judah enjoyed prosperity under King Uzziah, but they were aware of the disaster that was taking place in the northern kingdom of Israel. The Assyrians were a constant threat to their neighbour to the north and would not hesitate to make advances south toward Judah. Isaiah described the spiritual climate in the northern kingdom of Israel in the early days of his ministry in chapter 1:

*[2] Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: "Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. [3] The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." [4] Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged. (Isaiah 1)*

Israel despised the Holy One of Israel. Isaiah describes a godless and sinful generation that had no love for God nor concern for the principles of His laws. Isaiah describes a horrible sickness in Israel:

*[5] Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. [6] From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds; they are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil. (Isaiah 1)*

Remember that King Uzziah was stricken with leprosy because of his pride. Like Uzziah, the whole nation was sick from the “sole of the foot even to the head.” They were filled with bruises, sores and raw wounds that had not been bound up. The people of Isaiah’s day would have understood this imagery especially when Uzziah was experiencing this very thing as a leper under the judgment of God.

Uzziah was known for his strong army. 2 Chronicles 26:11 describes an “army of soldiers, fit for war.” This army of 307,500 men was a strong army with “mighty power” (2 Chronicles 26:12). Uzziah became famous for his military and provided them with all the weapons they needed to be successful in battle. In fact, under his reign, Judah was known for their invention of military machines:

*[14] And Uzziah prepared for all the army shields, spears, helmets, coats of mail, bows, and stones for slinging. [15] In Jerusalem he made machines, invented by skillful men, to be on the towers and the corners, to shoot arrows and great stones. And his fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong. (2 Chronicles 26)*

These weapons and military strength, however, would not mean anything when the judgement of the Lord fell upon

Judah. Listen to the words of the prophet to this great military power:

*[3:1] For behold, the Lord GOD of hosts is taking away from Jerusalem and from Judah support and supply, all support of bread, and all support of water; [2] the mighty man and the soldier, the judge and the prophet, the diviner and the elder, [3] the captain of fifty and the man of rank, the counselor and the skillful magician and the expert in charms. (Isaiah 3)*

Isaiah prophesied that the efforts of Uzziah to fortify and strengthen his military would come to nothing. The strength of Judah was not in her military but in her relationship with God. Isaiah warned his people that just as their northern neighbours suffered the judgement of God, so Judah would experience that same wrath if they did not turn from their sin.

It was in the year that King Uzziah died that the Lord appeared to Isaiah in great vision. In that vision, the angels of heaven reminded the prophet of the holiness and glory of God.

*[2] Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. [3] And one called to another and said:*

*“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isaiah 6)*

The vision of God's great holiness and glory terrified the prophet Isaiah, and he cried out:

*[5] ... “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”  
(Isaiah 6)*

Sensing his fear, one of the angels took a burning coal from the altar and touched Isaiah's mouth with it saying: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." It was by this means that the prophet Isaiah was anointed as a prophet of God. His lips were set apart and consecrated to God by this anointing.

That day, God gave Isaiah his orders:

*[9] And he said, "Go, and say to this people: "Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' [10] Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." (Isaiah 6)*

Isaiah's ministry would not be an easy one. God told him that people would hear what he had to say but not understand. He was to go to a people whose hearts were insensitive, whose ears were deaf, and whose eyes were blind. In other words, Isaiah would speak the word of God to them, but they would not receive it. God told the prophet that he was to continue preaching, however, until the cities of Judah lay waste without inhabitants (Isaiah 6:11).

Consider this commission for a moment. God revealed His holiness and glory to Isaiah and touched his lips to speak as His prophet. He would go in the power of the Lord, commissioned by the holy God of Judah, but despite his commission and anointing, people would not listen or obey the word of the Lord through him. A prophetic anointing does not mean that people will receive his or her message. Some prophets never see results from their ministry. The gifting of a true prophet should never be measured by how people respond. In fact, if people always react well to a prophet, we may have cause to wonder if he or she is preaching what God is asking them to preach. Prophets

often preach against evil and corruption in society. Their words often confront our sinfulness. This kind of message will not always be appreciated. God told Isaiah from the very beginning that he is to expect rejection, but he was to be faithful in preaching what God put on his lips.

King Jotham reigned in Judah after the death of Uzziah and Isaiah's commissioning as a prophet. He was a good king who "became mighty because he ordered his ways before the LORD his God" (2 Chronicles 27:6). During his reign, God gave Judah victory over the Ammonites (2 Chronicles 27:5). As king of Judah, he was engaged in a series of construction projects building walls, cities, towers and forts (2 Chronicles 27:3-4). All this indicates that the people of Judah were living in security and prosperity at this time.

While Jotham brought stability and prosperity to Judah, it is important to note that the spiritual climate of the land was not good. Listen to what 2 Chronicles 27 says about Judah's spiritual life in the days of Jotham:

*[2] And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD according to all that his father Uzziah had done, except he did not enter the temple of the LORD. But the people still followed corrupt practices. (2 Chronicles 27)*

There was a general apathy toward the things of God. Jotham did not enter the temple of the Lord. His people followed evil practices. This spiritual apathy in the generation of Jotham paved the way for open rebellion in the next generation who had not been taught the ways of God. Jotham's son Ahaz would turn from the Lord to the practice of Baal worship. 2 Chronicles 28 describe the spiritual conditions under King Ahab:

*[1] Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as his*

*father David had done, [2] but he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. He even made metal images for the Baals, [3] and he made offerings in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom and burned his sons as an offering, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. (2 Chronicles 28)*

By making images for the pagan god Baal, and practicing child sacrifice in Judah, Ahaz was openly rebelling against the holy and glorious God of Judah. 2 Chronicles 28 goes on to say that Ahaz sacrificed to the gods of Syria (2 Chronicles 28:23), cut up the vessels used in the worship of God (2 Chronicles 28:24), shut down the worship of God in the temple (2 Chronicles 28:24) and set up pagan altars in every city (2 Chronicles 28:25). The result of this terrible rebellion was that God allowed Ahaz's enemies to attack. Two of those nations were the nations of Syria and Israel. As these two nations prepared their advance against Judah, the Lord sent Isaiah to speak to King Ahaz. Isaiah told Ahaz not to fear what would happen to him, for the Lord God would not utterly abandon Judah at this time, and the nations who attacked him would themselves be scattered (see Isaiah 7:5-7).

As the battle unfolded, 120,000 men of Judah were killed in one day. Ahaz's son was one of those who perished. Another 200,000 were taken captive. Judah was greatly humbled. God, however, spoke to Ahaz and told him that he would have another child. He was to call this child Immanuel (meaning God with us). Before that child was old enough to know how to refuse evil and choose good, the two nations that had attacked him (Syria and Israel) would be deserted. Although Ahaz was defeated in battle, as Isaiah prophesied, the countries that had come against him would be scattered and abandoned.

In Isaiah 8 God gave Isaiah another word for King Ahaz. This time God warned him that because Judah continued

to rebel against God, He would bring another nation against them. The king of Assyria, who had been threatening Israel in the north would move southward and sweep into Judah:

*[5] The LORD spoke to me again: [6] "Because this people has refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently, and rejoice over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, [7] therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory. And it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks, [8] and it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck, and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel." (Isaiah 8)*

Isaiah would go on to tell Ahaz, however, that while these Assyrians would invade the land of Judah, a day of great victory was coming. A child would be born who would become King. This child would give peace and ultimate victory for the people of God:

*[6] For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. [7] Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. (Isaiah 9)*

Of course, we know this child to be the Lord Jesus. He would be the One True King who would bring victory over all enemies. He would reign forevermore over His people in a reign of peace and righteousness.

Before the coming of the Messiah, however, God had a cleansing work to do in Judah. The Assyrians would be



part of the purifying. In Isaiah 10, however, the prophets told his people that when God had finished his work with Judah, he would then punish the nation of Assyria for their arrogance and pride

*[12] When the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, he will punish the speech of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the boastful look in his eyes. (Isaiah 10)*

Isaiah prophesied that God would send a “wasting sickness” to Assyria’s warriors and the glory of the God of Israel would burn them like fire (Isaiah 10:16). Assyria would become an insignificant nation:

*[18] The glory of his forest and of his fruitful land the LORD will destroy, both soul and body, and it will be as when a sick man wastes away. [19] The remnant of the trees of his forest will be so few that a child can write them down. (Isaiah 10)*

In the northern kingdom of Israel, Assyria would take captive great numbers of Israelites and bring them to Assyria as prisoners. Isaiah prophesied, however, that this captivity would not be forever. The day was coming when a remnant of Israel would return to their homeland. While their destruction was decreed, God was a compassionate God and would restore them in His time.

*[20] In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. [21] A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. [22] For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness. [23] For the Lord GOD of hosts will make a full end, as decreed, in the midst of all the earth. (Isaiah 10)*

Isaiah would go on to say that God would raise up from the people of God a "Righteous Branch" (Isaiah 11:1). This branch would be from the lineage of Jesse, the father of David (11:1). The Spirit of the Lord would be on him giving him wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge and the fear of the Lord (11:12). This great ruler would "strike the earth with the rod of his mouth," he would judge the earth. His breath would kill the wicked (11:4). He would usher in a reign of peace and security as never before seen. Isaiah 11:6-9 describe this reign:

*[6] The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. [7] The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. [8] The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. [9] They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*  
(Isaiah 11)

Once again, Isaiah predicts the reign of the Lord Jesus who would fill the earth with the knowledge of God and restore righteousness and peace.

The reign of God would not be over Israel and Judah only. He would reign over the whole earth. As if to emphasize this point, God gave Isaiah a word for the enemies of Israel and Judah. In chapters thirteen to twenty-four, Isaiah prophesied to seven different nations. He told Babylon that God was raising up the Medes and Persians to destroy them (13:17-19). God would break the power and authority of the Assyrians (14:25). The Philistines would be killed by famine (14:30). The nation of Moab would be laid waste (15:1). Syria's capital city Damascus would cease to be a city of any influence (17:1). God would cut the blossom of

the fruit tree before they could produce crops in Cush (18:5). Egypt would be given over to a hard master and the branches of her great river would diminish (19:4-6). Jerusalem would experience a day of confusion and the breaking down of her walls (22:5). Tyre would be laid waste and her pride broken (23:1,9). The Assyrians would raise a siege tower against Sidon (23:13). In fact, Isaiah describes a day when the whole earth would be empty and plundered (24:3). The God of Isaiah was sovereign over all nations, and all peoples were accountable to Him. Isaiah's righteous Branch would one day bring all things under submission to the purpose of God the Father.

To demonstrate this sovereignty of God over all nations, God told Isaiah to take off the sackcloth and sandals he was wearing. Isaiah obeyed and walked around naked for a period of about three years (Isaiah 20:2). Only after these three years did the Lord explain to the people why He had asked his servant Isaiah to do so:

*[3] Then the LORD said, "As my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Cush, [4] so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptian captives and the Cushite exiles, both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, the nakedness of Egypt. (Isaiah 20)*

God told the people that the king of Assyria would lead Egyptian and Cushite captives into exile barefoot and with their buttocks uncovered. When this prophecy was fulfilled, the people would know that God was sovereign over all nations and their destiny was in His hands.

Isaiah proclaimed that his God was sovereign, just, and holy but he was also a God of tremendous compassion and mercy. He reminded his people in Isaiah 26:21, that

as a God of holy justice, He was going to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity:

*[21] For behold, the LORD is coming out from his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and the earth will disclose the blood shed on it and will no more cover its slain. (Isaiah 26)*

While God would punish the earth for sin, He would also move in compassion. Isaiah went on to prophecy that a day was coming when the iniquities of God's people would be atoned for, and their sin removed:

*[9] Therefore by this the guilt of Jacob will be atoned for, and this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin: when he makes all the stones of the altars like chalk-stones crushed to pieces, no Asherim or incense altars will remain standing. (Isaiah 27)*

God would establish a reign of justice and righteousness for His people:

*[17] And I will make justice the line, and righteousness the plumb line; and hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters will overwhelm the shelter." (Isaiah 28)*

At the head of this wonderful kingdom of justice and righteousness would be one who is described as a tested and precious cornerstone:

*[16] therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'Whoever believes will not be in haste.' (Isaiah 28)*

This passage is quoted in the New Testament. In Matthew 21:42, Jesus compares Himself to the precious cornerstone Isaiah speaks of here. Defending the preaching of the apostles before the Jewish council, Peter said:

*[11] This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. (Acts 4)*

Both Paul and Peter would connect this prophecy of Isaiah to the Lord Jesus (see Ephesians 2:20 and 1 Peter 2:4-8). What Isaiah is saying in Isaiah 28 is that the Lord Jesus, as that tested and precious cornerstone would reign over a future kingdom of justice and righteousness.

In this kingdom of justice, Israel's covenant with death and the grave also be annulled. That is to say, death and the grave would have no more hold on them. They would live eternally.

*[18] Then your covenant with death will be annulled, and your agreement with Sheol will not stand; when the overwhelming scourge passes through, you will be beaten down by it. (Isaiah 28)*

Death would be swallowed up forever:

*[8] He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. (Isaiah 25)*

God's people would know and rejoice in His salvation in that new kingdom:

*[9] It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation." (Isaiah 25)*

There in that kingdom of justice and righteousness with no more pain or dying, God would keep His people in perfect peace and security:

*[26:1] In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: "We have a strong city; he sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks. [2] Open the gates, that the*

*righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in. [3] You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. [4] Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock. (Isaiah 26)*

Isaiah also prophesied in the days of King Hezekiah. Hezekiah was a good king who served the Lord. He opened the temple doors that had been closed by his father Ahaz and re-established the worship of God. Under his administration, Judah would experience a measure of success against the Philistines (2 Kings 18:8). He repaired the city walls and built up his weapons of war (2 Chronicles 32:5). 2 Chronicles 32:3-4 and 2 Kings 20:20 tells us that Hezekiah blocked the supply of water from outside the city and set up a system that would guarantee water for the city. 2 Chronicles 32:4 shows us that he did this in anticipation of an Assyrian invasion.

*[4] A great many people were gathered, and they stopped all the springs and the brook that flowed through the land, saying, "Why should the kings of Assyria come and find much water?" (2 Chronicles 32)*

It may be that Hezekiah understood the threat of an Assyrian invasion because of reports that he had heard from Israel but also because of the prophecy of Isaiah. Isaiah had made it clear that there would be an invasion of Jerusalem:

*[1] Ah, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David encamped! Add year to year; let the feasts run their round. [2] Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be moaning and lamentation, and she shall be to me like an Ariel. [3] And I will encamp against you all around, and will besiege you with towers and I will raise siegeworks against you. (Isaiah 29)*

Likely, with this coming invasion in mind, God told Isaiah to speak to his people about not seeking refuge in Egypt. In the northern kingdom of Israel, the people of God had turned to Egypt for help against their invaders. God told

Judah, however, that despite the overwhelming numbers of Assyrians that were coming against them, they were not to seek help from Egypt. Isaiah warned Judah that Egypt would not be any help for them:

*[3] Therefore shall the protection of Pharaoh turn to your shame, and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt to your humiliation. (Isaiah 30)*

This word from Isaiah would be a real test for the people of Judah. Listen to how the Lord described the inhabitants of Judah in the days of Isaiah:

*[9] For they are a rebellious people, lying children, children unwilling to hear the instruction of the LORD;*

*[10] who say to the seers, "Do not see," and to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions, [11] leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel." (Isaiah 30)*

God's people were rebellious and unwilling to hear the instructions of the Lord. They did not want to listen to the truth but only things that would please them. We can imagine that the instruction of Isaiah not to seek the help of Egypt would be severely tested when the Assyrians invaded.

God had a plan for His people, however. Listen to what God told Isaiah about this plan:

*[23] For when he sees his children, the work of my hands, in his midst, they will sanctify my name; they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob and will stand in awe of the God of Israel. [24] And those who go astray in spirit will come to understanding, and those who murmur will accept instruction." (Isaiah 29)*

It was God's intention to restore His people to a right relationship with Himself. He wanted to demonstrate His

power and compassion so that His people would again stand in awe of Him and sanctify His name as holy. Isaiah prophesied that God would move in power when the Assyrians invaded:

*[30] And the LORD will cause his majestic voice to be heard and the descending blow of his arm to be seen, in furious anger and a flame of devouring fire, with a cloud-burst and storm and hailstones. [31] The Assyrians will be terror-stricken at the voice of the LORD, when he strikes with his rod. (Isaiah 30)*

When God moved in power to defend His people from Assyria, they would see the futility of trusting in mere flesh:

*[3] The Egyptians are man, and not God, and their horses are flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD stretches out his hand, the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall, and they will all perish together. (Isaiah 31)*

It would not be a human sword that brought victory to Gods' people over Assyria but an act of the Lord on their behalf:

*[8] "And the Assyrian shall fall by a sword, not of man; and a sword, not of man, shall devour him; and he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be put to forced labor. (Isaiah 31)*

The Lord asked His people to refrain from seeking any human help, so He could demonstrate His power to be their defender. When the Assyrians invaded in Isaiah 36:1, they openly mocked Jerusalem declaring that even their God would not give them victory. Hezekiah was troubled but prayed and sought the word of the Lord from Isaiah. Isaiah told him that the Assyrians camped outside the city would not be any threat to them. In fact, Isaiah prophesied that they would return to their homeland without any battle. The commander who had so openly ridiculed them would



perish in his homeland and no longer be a threat to Judah. As impossible as this seemed to be, the Lord was true to His word through the prophet. Isaiah 37 describes what took place:

*[36] And the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. [37] Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home and lived at Nineveh. [38] And as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, struck him down with the sword. And after they escaped into the land of Ararat, Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place. (Isaiah 37)*

Without Judah lifting a sword, 185,000 Assyrians were killed in one night as the angel of the Lord moved throughout the camp. The commander of the army returned, and his very own sons slew him with the sword.

In an incredibly powerful way, the Lord God demonstrated His power on behalf of His people. What was seen that day was only the beginning of what the Lord wanted to do. Isaiah 31-33 describe an even more important work of God:

*[7] For in that day everyone shall cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which your hands have sinfully made for you. [8] "And the Assyrian shall fall by a sword, not of man; and a sword, not of man, shall devour him; and he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be put to forced labor.*

*[9] His rock shall pass away in terror, and his officers desert the standard in panic," declares the LORD, whose fire is in Zion, and whose furnace is in Jerusalem. (Isaiah 31)*

While the Assyrians would desert their posts in panic when the fire of Zion ravaged their camp, the hand of God would also purify the nation of Judah from their idols of silver and gold. A great King would come to rule in righteousness

*[1] Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule in justice. (Isaiah 32)*

During the reign of this reign of righteousness God's people would be changed:

*[3] Then the eyes of those who see will not be closed, and the ears of those who hear will give attention.*

*[4] The heart of the hasty will understand and know, and the tongue of the stammerers will hasten to speak distinctly. (Isaiah 32)*

Eyes would see what they had never before seen. Ears would hear a voice they had for a long time resisted (see Isaiah 30:9-11). Hearts that had been hardened would again become tender to the things of God. God would change their city:

*[5] The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness, [6] and he will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is Zion's treasure. (Isaiah 33)*

Justice and righteousness would replace pride and sinfulness. God would provide stability and security for His people. They would see this demonstrated by how He defeated the Assyrians who invaded their land. God would be their salvation, wisdom, and knowledge. They would not need to look to other nations for support or help for God would be all they needed.

In Isaiah 38 the prophet received a word from the Lord for Hezekiah. He was to tell him to put his house in order because he would die (Isaiah 38:1). Upon hearing this,

Hezekiah pleaded with the Lord, and the Lord listened to his request and sent Isaiah back with a word that his life would be extended for another fifteen years (Isaiah 38:4-6).

During those fifteen years, envoys would come from Babylon for a visit with Hezekiah. The king showed them all the treasures of the kingdom. Again, the Lord sent Isaiah to speak to Hezekiah. God told him that the day would come when this nation of Babylon would return to take away the treasure that he had shown them (see Isaiah 39:5).

When the prophet Isaiah was called by God in Isaiah 6, he saw a vision of a glorious and holy God. This vision was inscribed on his heart and mind. When he saw that vision, Isaiah fell to his face in awe, reverence, and fear. The theme of the holiness and glory of God are everywhere present in the book of Isaiah. There is however another prominent theme in his prophecy –the tender love of God for His people.

Isaiah 40 begins with words of comfort from a holy and glorious God – “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God (Isaiah 40:1). Isaiah goes on in the chapter to prophesy a time of great blessing for the people of God when that glory of the Lord would be revealed to them:

*[3] A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. [4] Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. [5] And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” (Isaiah 40)*

Matthew 3:1-3 tells us that this prophecy was fulfilled by John the Baptist who cried out to the people of his day and

announced the coming of the Lord Jesus who would be the revelation of God's glory on this earth.

The glory of Isaiah's God is recorded for us in Isaiah 40. Here in this chapter, He is described as a tender shepherd (verse 11). It was this tender shepherd who measured the waters of the earth in his hands, personally spread out the heavens and weighed the mountains (verse 12). He depended on no one for counsel or advice or understanding (verse 14). The power and majesty of the nations are a "drop from a bucket" compared to the Lord God of Isaiah (verse 15). This God brought princes and rulers to nothing (verse 23). He is the creator of the heavens and knows all the stars by name (verse 26). Nothing is hidden from His knowledge and insight (verse 27). His power is unlimited, and He never grows tired (verse 28).

Isaiah reminded his people that it was this glorious and majestic God of power and wisdom who claimed them as His people and called friends.

*[8] But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; [9] you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off"; [10] fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41)*

The power and resources of this God were at their disposal. As His servants, God wanted to use them to be a light to the nations:

*[6] "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, [7] to open the eyes that are blind,*

*to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. (Isaiah 42)*

While the potential for Israel under the empowering blessing of God was beyond imagination, the reality of their life was far from this.

*[21] The LORD was pleased, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify his law and make it glorious. [22] But this is a people plundered and looted; they are all of them trapped in holes and hidden in prisons; they have become plunder with none to rescue, spoil with none to say, "Restore!" (Isaiah 42)*

Instead of empowerment and blessing, God's people were plundered and looted. Hiding in prisons and trapped in holes of the earth. This was a far cry from what God intended for them. They were a desperate people crying out in poverty when a great table had been set out for them. They were an imprisoned people in a prison that had no locks. You can sense the grief of Isaiah and the Lord God for these people of potential who wasted away in poverty and shame.

As a tender God of compassion, the Lord God of Israel would not sit back while His children wasted away. Isaiah speaks comfort to his people in Isaiah 43:1-2:

*[1] But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. [2] When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. (Isaiah 43)*

The prophet reminds his people that even in their weakness and rebellion, their God would protect them. Beyond this, Isaiah assured them that in His tender compassion

their God would blot out their sin and remember them no more:

*[25] "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. (Isaiah 43)*

The shame of God's people would be removed as God extended His forgiveness and healing. Along with that forgiveness, God would also pour out His refreshing and empowering Spirit:

*[3] For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. [4] They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams. (Isaiah 44)*

This ministry of God toward His people would not be without cost. For their sins to be blotted out and for the Spirit to be poured out on them, the Lord God would pay a very dear price. Isaiah prophesied of a "servant" who would come to sprinkle or cleanse the nations:

*[13] Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted.*

*[14] As many were astonished at you— his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—*

*[15] so shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand. (Isaiah 52)*

This servant is described as "high and lifted up." Before Him, the kings of the earth would be silent. Isaiah would go on in chapter 53 to describe this servant in more detail:

*[2] For he grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should*

*desire him. [3] He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. [4] Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. [5] But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. [6] All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. [7] He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. (Isaiah 53)*

There can be no question about the identity of this servant. He is the Lord Jesus who perfectly fits this description. This was the cost of Israel's redemption—it is the cost of our redemption. His life would be laid down in payment of our debt so that our sins could be forgiven, and the Spirit poured out on us as children of God. Isaiah's holy and glorious God expressed His tender love by laying down His life for us. Isaiah made it clear that it was sin that separated God's people from their God:

*[2] but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. (Isaiah 59)*

Through the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, and His death on our behalf, this separation would be abolished. A great invitation is extended to the nation of God's people to turn from the futility of their ways and taste this wonderful salvation of the Lord:

*[55:1] "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat!*

*Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. [2] Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me and eat what is good and delight yourself in rich food. [3] Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.*  
(Isaiah 55)

Through Isaiah, the Lord called His people to forsake their sinful ways and call on Him. He promised to have compassion on all who would come to Him:

*[6] "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; [7] let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. (Isaiah 55)*

Isaiah conveys a sense of urgency in this invitation. God's people were to seek the Lord while He could still be found and call on Him while He was near. This invitation would not last forever.

Isaiah reminded his people that God loved them as a husband loved his wife.

*[5] For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. [6] For the LORD has called you like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God.*  
(Isaiah 54)

He delighted in her and wanted to care for her and love her as His bride. As his bride, the Lord God would abundantly bless her. He would enlarge her tent, and their offspring would spread out and possess whole nations:



*[2] "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. [3] For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities. (Isaiah 54)*

As her husband, God would make her secure.

*[18] Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise. (Isaiah 60)*

Foreigners would join with Israel in the worship of her God. This tender compassion of God and the salvation He offered would be extended to the whole earth.

*[6] "And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant— [7] these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." (Isaiah 56)*

Foreigners and Israelites would be joined together under one God and the salvation He offered. Isaiah describes the blessing that will one day be theirs as a united people under God:

*[19] The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. [20] Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended. [21]*

*Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I might be glorified. (Isaiah 60)*

Notice several details in this prophecy of Isaiah. First, there was a day coming when there would be no more sun to shine on them for the Lord God would be their “everlasting light.” The Lord God told the apostle John the same thing in Revelation 22:

*[5] And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22)*

Second, Isaiah prophesied of a day when all “mourning shall be ended.” Again, this corresponds exactly with what the apostle John heard in his vision of heaven in Revelation 21:

*[4] He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21)*

Finally, Isaiah prophesied that the day was coming when “your people shall all be righteous.” Once again John expressed this same understanding when he spoke about the holy city in Revelation 21:

*[27] But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life. (Revelation 21)*

Isaiah looked forward to the day when God would create a new heaven and new earth where He would dwell forever with His people. In that new heaven and earth, everything would be made new, and God’s people would be “glad and rejoice forever” (Isaiah 65:17).

*[17] "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. [18] But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. [19] I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. (Isaiah 65)*

There in that eternal city, nothing would harm the bride of God.

*[25] The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain," says the LORD. (Isaiah 65)*

Eternal blessing, security, and peace in the presence of God would be the portion for all, Jew or Gentile who received from Him the salvation He came to offer at the cost of his dear Son's life.

The message of Isaiah is a powerful one. His sense of the glory and holiness of God penetrates the entire prophecy. He was also profoundly aware that this majestic and all-powerful God was a God of tender compassion and grace. He pleaded with his people to enter the joy of intimacy with God and spoke of an enduring relationship beyond the sin and corruption of this earth in a new heaven and new earth.

Isaiah speaks to sin and corruption in His day. He was intensely evangelistic as a prophet and described in detail that purpose of God to send His Son to die for our sin. He describes for us the blessing of salvation and eternal life in the presence of God. His heart cries out to Israel and Judah to come to this God and accept His offer of salvation.

For Consideration:

Consider the similarities in the message of Hosea and Isaiah regarding intimacy with God and the illustration of marriage as an example of the relationship God wanted with His people.

What was the spiritual climate in Israel and Judah at the time of Isaiah's ministry according to Isaiah 1?

How did the vision of Isaiah in chapter 6 impact his message?

What do we learn from Isaiah 6:9-10 about the ministry of Isaiah? How do we measure the success of a prophet?

Give some examples of Isaiah's prophecy about the coming Messiah. Why was this important to Isaiah and the people of his day?

How would you give a presentation of the gospel using only the book of Isaiah?

What was the focus of Isaiah's prophetic ministry? What his heartfelt desire for his listeners?

What does the prophet Isaiah teach us about God?

For Prayer:

What vision has God given you? How does this impact your life and actions?

Take a moment to consider what Isaiah teaches about the barrier of sin to a relationship with God. Ask God to help you see if there is anything in your life right now that keeps you from experiencing a deeper relationship with Him.

Take a moment to thank the Lord for the provision of Isaiah's prophesied Messiah in the person of the Lord Jesus. Thank Him for His willing sacrifice on your behalf.

Thank the Lord for the vision of the new heavens and new earth Isaiah saw. Thank the Lord that this will one day become a reality for all who know the Lord Jesus as their Saviour.

## Chapter 15 - Micah

We are introduced to the prophet Micah in the first verse of his prophecy:

*[1] The word of the LORD that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. (Micah 1)*

According to this verse he came from the region of Moresheth. Moresheth was likely a border town located close to the Philistine city of Gath about 34 kilometres (21 miles) southwest of Jerusalem in the southern kingdom of Judah. In fact, the town is called Moresheth-gath in Micah 1:14, likely because of this proximity to this Philistine city.

Notice also from Micah 1:1 that the prophet ministered during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, Kings of Judah. We have examined this historical context in other chapters, but I will touch on it briefly again for the sake of clarity in this chapter.

Under Jotham, Judah experienced a time of prosperity and blessing. 2 Chronicles 27:1-4 detail several construction projects that he undertook during his reign. He also engaged the Amorites in battle and was victorious over them, forcing them to pay an annual tribute (2 Chronicles 27:5). 2 Chronicles 27:6 describes his reign:

*[6] So Jotham became mighty because he ordered his ways before the LORD his God.*

Along with the prosperity came several social problems, among them was the oppression of the poor and needy. Micah would speak to these issues.

When Ahaz came to power, he rebelled against the Lord and began to offer sacrifices to Baal. He would go as far as providing his own sons as an offering to this pagan god (2 Chronicles 28:1-4). Ahaz closed the doors of the temple, and the worship of God ceased in Judah (2 Chronicles 28:24). Because of his rebellion, the Lord sent enemies against him. The Syrians would invade (2 Chronicles 28:5). The northern kingdom of Israel would pose a significant threat to Judah. 2 Chronicles 28:5-6 tells us that they invaded Judah and killed 120,000 in a single day and took 200,000 captives. Edom (2 Chronicles 28:17), Philistia (2 Chronicles 28:18), and Assyria (2 Chronicles 28:20) all oppressed Judah during the reign of Ahaz. All this was because of his rebellion against the Lord God. It was only when Hezekiah became king that the temple doors were once again opened, and the worship of the Lord God restored to the land (2 Chronicles 29:3-11).

The northern kingdom of Israel was struggling with the Assyrians. In fact, it would be during the ministry of Micah that the nation of Israel would go into captivity in Assyria. These were the days in which Micah lived.

There is one more detail we need to see in Micah 1:1:

*[1] The word of the LORD that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. (Micah 1)*

Notice that the word of the LORD came to him concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. Samaria was the capital of the

northern kingdom of Israel. Jerusalem was the capital of the southern country of Judah. This shows us that Micah was a prophet not only to his own nation of Judah but also to Israel. He would be among the last prophets to speak to Israel before they went into exile in Assyria.

Micah begins his prophetic message with a warning:

*[3] For behold, the LORD is coming out of his place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth. [4] And the mountains will melt under him, and the valleys will split open, like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place. (Micah 1)*

He speaks here about the Lord coming to tread upon the high places of the earth. That day would be a day of terror. Mountains would melt, and valleys would be split open in the presence of this awesome and terrifying God. Micah went on to tell his listeners the reason God was coming:

*[5] All this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And what is the high place of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem? (Micah 1)*

The Lord was manifesting His presence because of the sin of His people. He had come in power to judge.

Speaking to the northern kingdom of Israel and its capital of Samaria he said:

*[7] All her carved images shall be beaten to pieces, all her wages shall be burned with fire, and all her idols I will lay waste, for from the fee of a prostitute she gathered them, and to the fee of a prostitute, they shall return. (Micah 1)*

Micah told the people of Samaria that the Lord God was angry with their unfaithfulness. He would destroy the carved images and idols she had used in rebellion against



Him. Micah warned the people of Israel that the Lord would bring a great nation against them to conquer them. This nation would take them into exile away from their land and their idols.

*[15] I will again bring a conqueror to you, inhabitants of Mareshah; the glory of Israel shall come to Adullam. [16] Make yourselves bald and cut off your hair, for the children of your delight; make yourselves as bald as the eagle, for they shall go from you into exile. (Micah 1)*

It was not just for their idol worship that the Lord would punish His people. They were guilty of many other sins as well. In Micah 2, the prophet also addressed the sins of deceit, oppression, and greed:

*[1] Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil on their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in the power of their hand. [2] They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance. (Micah 2)*

There were people of power and influence in the land who were greedy for gain. They would devise evil schemes on their bed at night and put them into practice in the morning. These plans involved seizing land that was not theirs, taking away homes and depriving citizens of their inheritance. All this was to satisfy their lust for possessions.

Another matter that grieved the heart of God was related to how His people responded to the prophets He sent to them. Listen to what they said to these prophets:

*[6] "Do not preach"—thus they preach—"one should not preach of such things; disgrace will not overtake us." (Micah 2)*

The people of God despised the prophets. They did not want to hear them preach about coming judgement. They

refused to believe that any harm would come to them despite the warnings these prophets brought. They blocked their ears to the word of the Lord through His servants. While they blocked their ears to the true prophets of God they loved those who spoke "wind and lies."

*[11] If a man should go about and utter wind and lies, saying, "I will preach to you of wine and strong drink," he would be the preacher for this people! (Micah 2)*

They liked people who preached what they wanted to hear. They delighted in those who justified an immoral and ungodly lifestyle. They were entertained by these preachers but wanted nothing to do with those who promoted a righteous life.

Micah spoke boldly to the leaders of the nations of Israel and Judah.

*[3:1] And I said: Hear, you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel! Is it not for you to know justice? — [2] you who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin from off my people and their flesh from off their bones,*

He accused the leaders of God's people of loving sin and hating good. They were oppressors who would tear the skin off God's people and the flesh from their bones. They had no concern for these they led. In fact, they oppressed them and took advantage of them for their own sinful purposes. These were bold words from Micah. By speaking them, he risked his own life.

It was not just the influential secular leaders who were guilty before the Lord. Micah also speaks against his fellow prophets:

*[5] Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who cry "Peace" when they have*

*something to eat, but declare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths. (Micah 3)*

Micah accused his fellow prophets of speaking what people wanted to hear. If someone gave these prophets something to eat, they would proclaim a message of peace to them. They would, on the other hand, declare war against those who gave them nothing. These prophets were not concerned about the word of the Lord but were greedy for gain and profit.

Micah reminds these prophets that he was different from them.

*[8] But as for me, 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. (Micah 3)*

Micah was not interested in pleasing people. This was not his motivation. He spoke because he was filled with the Spirit to talk about justice and the sin of God's people. In this statement, we have the focus of Micah's ministry. He understood that God had called him to speak to the nations about their sin and injustice.

It grieved Micah to see the condition of the nation and know that they were under the judgement of God. It caused great pain to know that God's people would not listen to his warning. You can sense this grief in Micah 3:11-12:

*[11] 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." [12] Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height. (Micah 3)*

Micah told his people what God required of them:

*[7] Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" [8] 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? (Micah 6)*

Despite their sinful ways, the people of Judah continued to worship God by bringing their offerings. Micah told them, however, that the Lord was interested in much more than mindless offerings. He required justice, kindness, and humility. The people who came to worship, however, were oppressing their neighbours and fellow citizens. They were showing no concern for their friends in need. All they could think of was themselves. This is what they lived for. Micah rebuked this attitude. In essence, he told his people that God was not interested in offerings from those whose heart and life was not in tune with Him.

The prophet would go on in Micah 6 to speak to the people who came to the temple with their offerings:

*[11] Shall I acquit the man with wicked scales and with a bag of deceitful weights? [12] Your rich men are full of violence; your inhabitants speak lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth. (Micah 6)*

Do you think God will accept the offerings of those who continue to deceive their customers with dishonest weights, he asked? Do you really believe that you can come to God with an acceptable offering when you are filled with violence and lies?

In Micah 7 the prophet goes on to declare by the Spirit, the condition of the land in his day.

*[2] The godly has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among mankind; they all lie in wait for blood,*

*and each hunts the other with a net. [3] Their hands are on what is evil, to do it well; the prince and the judge ask for a bribe, and the great man utters the evil desire of his soul; thus they weave it together. [4] The best of them is like a brier, the most upright of them a thorn hedge. The day of your watchmen, of your punishment, has come; now their confusion is at hand. [5] Put no trust in a neighbor; have no confidence in a friend; guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your arms; [6] for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house. (Micah 7)*

The society Micah describes is a broken society. The godly are perishing. People attack one another to advance their own cause. Bribery, dishonesty, injustice abounded. No one could trust the word of even the closest member of his or her family. Even parents and children treated each other with contempt.

Micah warned his people that the day of judgement was quickly coming. He told the northern kingdom of Israel that a conqueror would come against them (1:15). He also prophesied that Judah would go into captivity in Babylon:

*[10] Writhe and groan, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor, for now, you shall go out from the city and dwell in the open country; you shall go to Babylon. There you shall be rescued; there the LORD will redeem you from the hand of your enemies. (Micah 4)*

Notice, in Micah 4:10 that while God would send Judah into captivity in Babylon, there was still hope for her. "There the LORD will redeem you from the hand of your enemies," Micah told them (Micah 4:10). The anger of God was real, and He would indeed strip them of everything, but He would not abandon them.

Micah prophesied of a day when God would release His people from bondage, just as he had done for their ancestors in Egypt:

*[15] As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, I will show them marvelous things. (Micah 7)*

The God of Israel and Judah was a pardoning God:

*[18] Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. [19] He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7)*

The day was coming when, after they had been punished, the people of God would know His forgiveness. He would cast their sins far from them to remember them no more. In fact, there were glorious days coming for the people of God. Micah describes these days in chapter 4:

*[1] It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, [2] and many nations shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. (Micah 4)*

The day was coming when the word of the Lord would go out from Jerusalem and touch many nations. Those nations would come to the God of Israel and walk in His paths. This was a foreign concept to the people of Micah's day, who saw themselves alone as the people of God and foreign nations as Gentile pagans. According to Micah,

however, these things would change, and the God of Israel would be the God of the nations.

Micah went on to describe a time of peace among the nations of the world under the reign of the Lord God of Israel:

*[3] He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide disputes for strong nations far away; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; [4] but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken. (Micah 4)*

Micah prophesied that there would be no more need for swords and spears. People would live in a world where a nation no longer lift a sword against another nation. All people would live in peace and security.

How would this time of peace come about? Micah prophesied that it would all begin in the little town of Bethlehem. A great ruler would be born who would shepherd His people and lead them into this peace:

*[2] But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. [3] Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. [4] And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. (Micah 5)*

Notice several details about this ruler, according to the prophecy of Micah. He would come from Bethlehem (verse

2). He is described as a ruler (verse 2). His “coming forth” was from ancient days (verse 2). The term coming forth shows the origin of this ruler. In other words, the ruler that would be born was from ancient days—he came from eternity past. Through he was from eternity past, he would be born of a woman into this world (verse 3). This ruler would be a shepherd for his people (verse 4). He would shepherd his people with the all-powerful “strength of the Lord.” He would reign in the “majesty of the name of the LORD his God” (verse 4).

There is only one person who could fit this description. The Lord Jesus, the Son of God who existed in eternity past, was born of a woman and came into this world to be the Great Shepherd. He demonstrated to us the power and majesty of God. By his death, he drew men and women of all nations to the God of Israel. His work is still being felt in our day as people from every country come flocking to the God of Israel. He alone would be able to restore peace with God and peace between brothers and sisters.

Micah prophesied that the Lord would purify the nation of its sinful ways and restore them to a relationship with her God:

*[10] And in that day, declares the LORD, I will cut off your horses from among you and will destroy your chariots; [11] and I will cut off the cities of your land and throw down all your strongholds; [12] and I will cut off sorceries from your hand, and you shall have no more tellers of fortunes; [13] and I will cut off your carved images and your pillars from among you, and you shall bow down no more to the work of your hands; [14] and I will root out your Asherah images from among you and destroy your cities. [15] And in anger and wrath I will execute vengeance on the nations that did not obey. (Micah 5)*



In this restored kingdom, the Lord Himself would be their ruler. He would gather His people from all over the world, heal them and care for them:

*[6] In that day, declares the LORD, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away and those whom I have afflicted; [7] and the lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and forevermore. (Micah 4)*

Notice particularly in Micah 4:7 that Micah prophesied that the Lord would reign over His people “from this time forth and forevermore.” This reign would have no end, nor would it have anyone to challenge it for the Lord God all-mighty would be the King.

Micah summarizes his own ministry in Micah 3:8. He had been anointed and filled with the power of the Spirit to “declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.” I would go on to say that not only did he declare to the people of God their sin and transgression, but he also revealed to them the solution in the person of the Lord Jesus born in the town of Bethlehem. Micah’s longing was to see the people of God restored to fellowship with their God. He spoke powerfully about the obstacle to this fellowship and called them to return to the Lord with all their heart. He rebuked a people who brought their offerings to the Lord but whose heart was far from Him. He spoke to their greedy and materialistic attitude. Micah did not hide the fact that God would judge His people’s sin but reminded them that their God was a pardoning God who not forget those who came to Him.

### For Consideration:

Describe the historical context of Micah's day. What was the spiritual climate in his day? What was the economic climate?

How did the economic climate impact the society of Micah's day? What was happening between the rich and the poor?

How did the people of God respond to the message of the true prophets of God? What was the message of the false prophets according to Micah 2:11 and 3:5?

Micah described his ministry as a revelation of transgression and sin. Have we lost sight of our own sins? How important is a ministry like Micah's in our own day?

What does Micah teach us about the Lord Jesus and His ministry? What parts of Micah's prophecy about Jesus have been fulfilled? What parts of his prophecy are yet to be fulfilled through the ministry of Jesus?

### For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to forgive you for times when you have failed to see your own sin.

Ask God to raise up true prophets in our day who can speak the truth of God. Ask Him to expose the false prophets of our day.

Take a moment to consider the grace of Micah's "pardon-ing God" in sending His Son to be our "Ruler" and "Shepherd." Thank the Lord Jesus for His tender care and sacrifice. Thank Him that the day is coming when He will reign physically over His people, and we will know peace and security forevermore.

Thank the Lord Jesus for the peace He gives presently and for His spiritual reign over us as His people.

## Chapter 16 - Nahum

We know very little about the prophet Nahum. In fact, Nahum 1:1 is the only place in the Bible we read about him. All we know about him, therefore, is found in this one verse.

*[1] An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh. (Nahum 1)*

The prophet's name means "comfort." We will see that his message was designed to be a comfort to a people who were suffering at the hand of their enemy. Verse 1 tells us that the prophet was from the region of Elkosh. Once again, the region is as obscure as the prophet. Historians have debated the location of this unknown region. It is not in our interest to enter this debate in this context. Suffice it to say that Nahum is a relatively unknown prophet from an equally unknown region.

Nahum 1:1 also tells us that the focus of the prophecy is about Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital city of the nation of Assyria. This city was in the northern part of current day Iraq. We need to understand here that the prophecy of Nahum is not directed exclusively to this city. The city, as the capital, represented the entire nation of Assyria. In speaking to Nineveh, Nahum addresses nation as the whole.

At this point in history, the city of Nineveh was a mighty city. The Assyrians were at the height of their power and were attacking and conquering many lands. Tribute from

these nations was pouring into the nation and Nineveh was benefitting from this wealth.

Nahum 1 seems to give us the context of his prophecy. Speaking to the people of Judah he said:

*[15] Behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him who  
brings good news, who publishes peace!  
Keep your feasts, O Judah; fulfill your vows, for never  
again shall the worthless pass through you;  
he is utterly cut off. (Nahum 1)*

Notice that Nahum speaks about a worthless people who were passing through the land. Nahum prophesies, however, that peace would return to the land of Judah. Nahum went on to say that, although these invaders were powerful, they would be cut down. The Lord would deliver His people from their oppression:

*[12] Thus says the LORD, "Though they are at full  
strength and many, they will be cut down and pass away.  
Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more. [13]  
And now I will break his yoke from off you and will burst  
your bonds apart." (Nahum 1)*

These invaders, with the powerful army, were the Assyrians. In the context of this Assyrian threat, Nahum offers "comfort" to his people by telling them what the Lord God would do to their enemy.

Nahum's words of comfort to Judah under Assyrian oppression comes in two forms. First, he speaks to his people about their God and who He was. Second, he tells his people what their God would do to the enemy.

*Who God Is*

First, Nahum speaks to his people about the nature of God. He reminded them that their God was a jealous and avenging God:

*[2] The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies. (Nahum 1)*

The jealousy of the Lord was for His people. He longed for them and would not share them with anyone else. He cared for them with a jealous yearning. Nahum told the people of Judah that this jealousy of God for them would drive him to seek vengeance on anyone who harmed them. God would take revenge on the Assyrians for the oppression of His people.

It is hard to understand why the Lord God would care for us as His people in this way, but Nahum was confident that God would not stand by and watch His people suffer needlessly. His jealous longing for those He loved would stir Him to act on their behalf.

Second, Nahum told his people that the Lord their God was slow to anger and great in power:

*[3] The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. [4] He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; he dries up all the rivers; Bashan and Carmel wither; the bloom of Lebanon withers. [5] The mountains quake before him; the hills melt; the earth heaves before him, the world and all who dwell in it. [6] Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him. (Nahum 1)*

Nahum's God was slow to anger but He was a mighty God who would rise and strike fear in the hearts of His enemies. No one who stood against His purpose could stand. As powerful as these Assyrian invaders were, they were no match for the God of Israel whose anger would make the mountains quake and the rocks break in pieces.

Finally, Nahum told his people that this jealous and powerful God was also a good God who was a stronghold for his people:

*[7] The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble;  
he knows those who take refuge in him.*

*[8] But with an overflowing flood he will make a complete  
end of the adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into  
darkness. (Nahum 1)*

Consider this for a moment. The God of Judah was a jealous and avenging God of anger and power. He would be a terrifying God were it not for the fact that He was also good and a stronghold for His people. Nahum reminds his people here that this great and awesome God was a good God. There was no evil in Him. His purpose for them was good. He would stand with them. His jealous anger would progress the cause of righteousness on the earth. His strength would be a stronghold for His people. He would defend them from all enemies.

Nahum comforts his people by reminding them about the nature of their God and His relationship with them as His children. If there is one thing the enemy would love to do in our trial, it would be to take our eyes off our God and our relationship with Him. Our comfort is in our God. Nahum knew this and began his prophecy by reminding his people that they were in the hands of a loving and all-powerful God who would fight jealously for them and their good.

*What God Would Do*

Next, Nahum prophesied that God would restore the majesty of Israel. They had been plundered and oppressed, but all that would end:

*[2] For the LORD is restoring the majesty of Jacob as the majesty of Israel, for plunderers have plundered them and ruined their branches. (Nahum 2)*

In a poetic and descriptive way, Nahum paints a picture of the devastation that was about to happen to the Assyrians. While Assyria's impressive soldiers and chariots dash here and there in the city the power of the Lord is against them. There is panic in the city the enemy approaches Nineveh and sets up its siege tower against it. Notice that, in fear, the officers stumble as they race to defend the wall of the city:

*[5] He remembers his officers; they stumble as they go, they hasten to the wall; the siege tower is set up. (Nahum 2)*

The efforts of these military officers are to no avail. The enemy breaks through:

*[6] The river gates are opened; the palace melts away; (Nahum 2)*

Nineveh's palace is destroyed (2:6). The women residing in that palace are carried off into exile weeping (2:7). Nahum compared the city of Nineveh to a pool that was quickly emptying:

*[8] Nineveh is like a pool whose waters run away. "Halt! Halt!" they cry, but none turns back. (Nahum 2)*

The enemy has come into the city, and the inhabitants now run for their lives abandoning their homes and possessions. The enemy plunders the massive wealth of Nineveh:



*[9] Plunder the silver, plunder the gold! There is no end of the treasure  
or of the wealth of all precious things. (Nahum 2)*

The people who had caused terror to so many, now fall on their knees in anguish and fear (2:10). The once great city of Nineveh would be left desolate and in ruins (2:10). Nahum proclaims the word of the Lord to the Assyrians:

*[13] Behold, I am against you, declares the LORD of hosts, and I will burn your chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions. I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messengers shall no longer be heard. (Nahum 2)*

Nahum makes it clear that the reason God was against Assyria was because of its great sin. He describes this sin in chapter 3. Nineveh was a bloody city full of lies and plunder:

*[1] Woe to the bloody city, all full of lies and plunder—  
no end to the prey! (Nahum 3)*

Assyria had accumulated her wealth by plundering and slaying other nations. This prosperity and wealth brought along with it many problems in Nineveh. Nahum describes the immorality that was also rampant in its streets:

*[4] And all for the countless whorings of the prostitute,  
graceful and of deadly charms,  
who betrays nations with her whorings, and peoples with  
her charms.*

*[5] Behold, I am against you, declares the LORD of hosts,  
and will lift up your skirts over your face;  
and I will make nations look at your nakedness and kingdoms  
at your shame. (Nahum 3)*

God would judge this immorality. In fact, He would make an example of the nation. People would be amazed that such a great and powerful nation could fall:

*[7] And all who look at you will shrink from you and say,  
"Wasted is Nineveh; who will grieve for her?"  
Where shall I seek comforters for you? (Nahum 3)*

Notice the reference to comforters for Nineveh. This was apparently a concern for Nahum, whose name meant "comfort" and whose prophesy was intended to bring comfort to the people of God under oppression. In the case of Nineveh, however, there would be no one to comfort them in their destruction.

Nahum compared the vast wealth of Nineveh to a fig tree with ripe fruit. When the tree was shaken, the fruit would fall into the mouths of those who shook the tree (Nahum 3:12). Their once prosperous merchants and powerful princes would be dispersed like locusts taking wing in large numbers (Nahum 3:16-17). There would be no easing of their hurt. Their wound would be mortal (Nahum 3:19). The once glorious nation of Assyria would be reduced to nothing.

Nahum's message is a simple one. God is for His people. He will destroy their enemy. His message, as simple as it may appear, is a powerful one and one we need to consider again in our day. Who among us does not need to be reminded of the nature of our God in times of trouble? How easy it is for us to lose sight of the Lord in our pain. Nahum challenges us to lift our eyes and see the majesty and power of our God who is a good God of jealous anger. He will do what is right. He will stand for us. Our enemies cannot win the battle as long as He is with us.

As a prophet, Nahum was an encourager. As his name suggests, his heart was to bring comfort to a people struggling under heavy oppression. He prophesied to bring comfort to a hurting people.

For Consideration:

What does Nahum's name mean? How did this work itself out in his ministry?

How easy is it to lose sight of God and His promises in our trials? Have you ever found yourself giving in to despair when you lost sight of God?

What did Nahum teach his people about God? How would this have been a comfort to them in their struggle?

What would God do to the Assyrians? Can our enemies ever triumph over us if God is on our side?

Nahum was a prophet who brought comfort to his people. He reminded God's people of God's undying care and jealousy for them. Do we need prophets like this in our day?

For Prayer:

Take a moment to consider the jealous love and care of God toward you. Thank the Lord that you are safe and secure in Him.

Ask God to help you to keep your eyes fixed on Him in your struggle and pain. Thank Him that in Him there is a great comfort.

Ask God to help you to be a “prophet of comfort” to those who are struggling around you. Ask Him to give you words to speak to those in need.



## Chapter 17 - Jeremiah

Jeremiah the prophet was from the town of Anathoth about 5 kilometres (3 miles) northeast of Jerusalem. We learn from Joshua 21:18 and 1 Chronicles 6:60 that this town had been set aside for the priests. Jeremiah's father, a man by the name of Hilkiah was one of the priests who lived in this town (see Jeremiah 1:1). Jeremiah was, therefore, the son of a priest and would have inherited this responsibility, as the priesthood was passed on from father to son.

Jeremiah 1:2-3 gives us the date of Jeremiah's ministry:

*[2] to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. [3] It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.*  
(Jeremiah 1)

According to these verses, Jeremiah ministered from the reign of Josiah to Zedekiah. This period of time also included the reigns of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin. Jeremiah ministered in Judah, therefore, during the reigns of four kings. To get a sense of the days in which Jeremiah lived, it is essential that we consider what was happening during the reigns of these five kings of Judah.

*Josiah*

Josiah was a good king but came to power at a time of tremendous evil in the land of Judah. King Manasseh before him had turned the nation from God and had defiled the land with idols and pagan gods. The temple was in disrepair.

It was the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign at the age of 26 that he ordered the repair of the temple of the Lord (2 Kings 22:3-7). It was during the restoration of the temple that the priests found a copy of the Book of the Law containing the law of God as given by Moses (2 Kings 22:8). When the book was read to Josiah, he was deeply touched by it and convicted by the sins of the nation (2 Kings 22:11-13).

Josiah, set out to cleanse not only the temple but the entire land of idolatry. 2 Kings 23 describes in some detail the efforts of Josiah to rid the nation of the idols and pagan practices introduced by King Manasseh. It is quite shocking to read the report of this cleansing that took place in the temple:

*[4] And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the second order and the keepers of the threshold to bring out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron and carried their ashes to Bethel. [5] And he deposed the priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to make offerings in the high places at the cities of Judah and around Jerusalem; those also who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and the moon and the constellations and all the host of the heavens. [6] And he brought out the Asherah from the house of the LORD, outside Jerusalem, to the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron and beat it to dust and cast the dust of it*

*upon the graves of the common people. [7] And he broke down the houses of the male cult prostitutes who were in the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the Asherah. (2 Kings 23)*

The priests removed the “vessels made for Baal, Asherah and the hosts of heaven” from the temple. Notice also from verse 7 that the king broke down the houses of the male cult prostitutes who were in the house of the Lord. We can see just how defiled the temple had become with these pagan altars and ungodly practices.

Josiah destroyed these shrines, altars, and images. According to 2 Kings 23:5 Josiah deposed the priests who had offered sacrifices and offerings to pagan gods. He defiled the region where child sacrifices were practiced (2 Kings 23:10). 2 Kings 23:21 tells us that he also “put away” mediums and necromancers (those who communicated with the dead):

*[24] Moreover, Josiah put away the mediums and the necromancers and the household gods and the idols and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might establish the words of the law that were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD. (2 Kings 23)*

The word translated “put away” in the Hebrew language literally means to burn. It is possible then that Josiah burned these mediums and necromancers to death. Under Josiah, not only was the land cleansed of its evil, but the worship of the Lord God was restored (see 2 Kings 23:21-23).

What is important for us to note, however, are the words of 2 Kings 23:26-27:

*[26] Still the LORD did not turn from the burning of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against*



*Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him. [27] And the LORD said, "I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and I will cast off this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there." (2 Kings 23)*

Despite the many reforms made in the days of Josiah, the anger of the Lord was not appeased against His people. He set His heart to punish them for the great evil they had allowed to fill the land from the time of Manasseh.

### *Jehoahaz*

After the death of Josiah, his son Jehoahaz became king. He reigned for three months in Jerusalem before Pharaoh Neco of Egypt captured and imprisoned him. 2 Kings 23:32 describe him as a king who did evil in the sight of the Lord. With the capture of Jehoahaz, Pharaoh Neco forced the nation of Judah to pay a tribute of one hundred talents of silver and one hundred talents of gold (see 2 Kings 23:33). Pharaoh Neco placed Jehoahaz's son Eliakim on the throne of Judah. The Pharaoh changed Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim. The name Eliakim, means, the Lord establishes or raises up. It is possible that Pharaoh Neco changed his name because of its meaning. During the reign of Jehoahaz, the people of God were experiencing political and social instability.

### *Jehoiakim*

To raise the money necessary to pay the tribute imposed by Egypt, King Jehoiakim imposed a tax on the people of Judah (2 Kings 23:35). This increased the financial burden for the average person in Judah.

Jehoiakim's eleven-year reign is described as evil in the sight of the Lord (see 2 Kings 23:37). During this time Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon came up against Judah. Jehoiakim was forced into submission and is described in 2 Kings 24:1 as being his servant for a period of three years. At the end of three years of servitude to the king of Babylon, however, Jehoiakim revolted. While Jehoiakim may have rebelled against Babylon, his military struggles were not resolved. 2 Kings 24:2 describes what happened after his rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar:

*[2] And the LORD sent against him bands of the Chaldeans and bands of the Syrians and bands of the Moabites and bands of the Ammonites, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by his servants the prophets. (2 Kings 24)*

The send bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites against Judah to destroy it. Jehoiakim would not be able to escape the judgement of God. God was determined to punish Judah for her great sin and rebellion in the days of Manasseh:

*[3] Surely this came upon Judah at the command of the LORD, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, [4] and also for the innocent blood that he had shed. For he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the LORD would not pardon. (2 Kings 24)*

Under Jehoiakim, the nation of Judah was steadily declining. Heavy taxation had been stripping the people of the land of their hard-earned money. The raids of the Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites not only created an atmosphere of instability but also created more hardship for the people of God. Jehoiakim did not turn to God in these days or repent and seek His forgiveness.

### *Jehoiachin*

Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim, took his father's place on the throne of Judah. He was an evil king (2 Kings 24:8). As we have seen, these were days of instability for Judah. Jehoiachin would only reign three months before Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon besieged the city of Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:10). The rebellion of his father against Babylon may have been, in part, the reason for this invasion.

According to 2 Kings 24:12, Jehoiachin gave himself up without a fight to the king of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar took him as a prisoner. It is clear from this that there was no fight left in Judah. The nation had been steadily declining from the time of Manasseh and his sinful ways. They had no power to resist Babylon, and so Jehoiachin surrendered.

Nebuchadnezzar plundered the temple of God, stripping it of its gold (2 Kings 24:13). The Babylonian king also carried off to Babylon 10,000 skilled craftsmen and smiths. He left only the poorest and most unskilled people in Judah (2 Kings 24:14). Jehoiachin and his family were taken back to Babylon as captives, ending his reign.

In the place of Jehoiachin, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Jehoiachin's uncle, Mattaniah as king. Nebuchadnezzar changed his name to Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:17).

*[17] And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah. (2 Kings 24)*

### *Zedekiah*

Zedekiah was the last king of Judah. He came to power at the age of twenty-one and reigned for 11 years in Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:18). He is described in 2 Kings 24:19 as

an evil king. During his reign, he rebelled against Babylon (2 Kings 24:20). This likely precipitated the next invasion by Nebuchadnezzar's forces.

The Babylonians laid siege to Jerusalem during the reign of Zedekiah causing severe famine in the city (2 Kings 25:3). In desperation, Zedekiah and some followers escaped through a hole in the city wall. The escape attempt was foiled, and the group was captured and brought to the king of Babylon. 2 Kings 25:6-7 describes what happened as a result:

*[6] Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they passed sentence on him. [7] They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes and put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in chains and took him to Babylon. (2 Kings 25)*

Zedekiah was forced to watch the death of his sons. This would be the very last thing he would see for, after this, the Babylonians pulled out his eyes and led him in chains, a defeated and starving king, into captivity in Babylon.

These were the days in which Jeremiah the prophet lived. They were days of instability and political unrest. These were the last days of the nation of Judah. Jeremiah watched them steadily decline under the judgement of God and go off into captivity losing everything they had. These were difficult days for Judah. Their end was near. Jeremiah would be the last prophet they would hear before they lost their land and homes. He would be their last chance before the judgement of God fell.

Jeremiah's call to be a prophet comes in the first chapter of his book. His call is important because it gives us a sense of what God was asking him to do. There are several details we need to see from Jeremiah's calling in chapter 1.

Notice first in Jeremiah 1:5 that God appointed Jeremiah to be a prophet to the nations even before he was born. There is much in this verse that we will not touch in this context. The critical point for us to notice is that God appointed him to be a prophet to the nations.

*[5] "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."*

The implication here is that Jeremiah's ministry would be an international one. God had some things to say to the nations of the world and Jeremiah would be the man he would use to communicate those messages.

From Jeremiah 1:6 we understand that Jeremiah felt unworthy of the task, but God told him that he was not to be afraid to go in His name and speak what He commanded him to speak (Jeremiah 1:7). Jeremiah 1:9-10 tells us that the Lord touched Jeremiah's mouth and said:

*[9] ... "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. [10] See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."*

This was the call of Jeremiah. He was to pluck up and break down, destroy and overthrow, build and plant. He was to do this with the words the Lord would give him. Jeremiah would announce the destruction and overthrow of nations at the hand of God. He would also, however, announce hope for his own country and remind them that they would be rebuilt and replanted in the Lord's time.

### *A Word to the Northern Kingdom of Israel*

Jeremiah begins his prophecy with the word of the Lord to the northern kingdom of Israel. He reminded them of how

they had, at one point been “holy to the LORD” (Jeremiah 2:3). They turned from their God, however, and “became worthless” (Jeremiah 2:4). Those who should have led the people to God did not even know Him. They served other gods instead:

*[8] The priests did not say, ‘Where is the LORD?’ Those  
who handle the law did not know me;  
the shepherds transgressed against me; the prophets  
prophesied by Baal  
and went after things that do not profit. (Jeremiah 2)*

According to Jeremiah the people of Israel had committed two evils –they had forsaken their god, and they made other gods for themselves:

*[13] for my people have committed two evils:  
they have forsaken me,  
the fountain of living waters,  
and hewed out cisterns for themselves,  
broken cisterns that can hold no water. (Jeremiah 2)*

God punished His people to correct their evil ways, but they resisted his correction. In fact, they killed the messengers of God who came to them:

*[30] In vain have I struck your children; they took no correction;  
your own sword devoured your prophets like a ravening  
lion. (Jeremiah 2)*

Because they refused God’s correction, they would be put to shame:

*[36] How much you go about, changing your way!  
You shall be put to shame by Egypt as you were put to  
shame by Assyria.*

*[37] From it too you will come away with your hands on  
your head,*

*for the LORD has rejected those in whom you trust, and you will not prosper by them. (Jeremiah 2)*

Jeremiah prophesied that the nation of Israel would be put to shame by Egypt just as they had been devastated by the kingdom of Assyria that had invaded the left them broke and helpless. We will see as this story unfolds how God's people, during the days of Jeremiah, would return to Egypt for protection against Babylon but that protection would not be provided.

### *A Word to the Southern Kingdom of Judah*

In Jeremiah 3, the prophet turns his attention to the southern kingdom of Judah. The northern nation of Israel had been defeated by the Assyrians by this time. All the skilled workers and craftsmen had been taken into exile leaving only the poorest people in the land to care for it. Judah had not yet been defeated. She saw what had happened to Israel but according to Jeremiah 3:8-10 she did not learn a lesson from this:

*[7] And I thought, 'After she has done all this she will return to me,' but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. [8] She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore. [9] Because she took her whoredom lightly, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree. [10] Yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but in pretense, declares the LORD." (Jeremiah 3)*

Because Judah refused to learn from the example of Israel, God would also punish her. Jeremiah was sent with a word to the southern kingdom in Jeremiah 4:

*[5] Declare in Judah, and proclaim in Jerusalem, and say,  
"Blow the trumpet through the land; cry aloud and say,  
'Assemble, and let us go into the fortified cities!' [6] Raise  
a standard toward Zion, flee for safety, stay not, for I  
bring disaster from the north, and great destruction. [7] A  
lion has gone up from his thicket, a destroyer of nations  
has set out; he has gone out from his place to make your  
land a waste;  
your cities will be ruins without inhabitant. (Jeremiah 4)*

Jeremiah prophesied that disaster and destruction would come to Judah from the north. A great lion would pounce on them and make their land waste. Their cities would be in ruins without inhabitants. Like her evil sister Israel, Judah would also lose her nation and be sent into exile.

It did not please the Lord to punish his people. Jeremiah speaks of the deep anguish of the heart of God over the punishment of His people:

*[19] My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain!  
Oh, the walls of my heart!  
My heart is beating wildly; I cannot keep silent,  
for I hear the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.  
[20] Crash follows hard on crash;  
the whole land is laid waste.  
Suddenly my tents are laid waste,  
my curtains in a moment.  
[21] How long must I see the standard and hear the  
sound of the trumpet? (Jeremiah 4)*

The heart of God was broken for His people, but they refused to listen to Him and repent:

*[5:1] Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem,  
look and take note!  
Search her squares to see if you can find a man,  
one who does justice and seeks truth,  
that I may pardon her.*



*[2] Though they say, "As the LORD lives," yet they swear falsely.*

*[3] O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth? You have struck them down,  
but they felt no anguish; you have consumed them,  
but they refused to take correction. They have made  
their faces harder than rock;  
they have refused to repent. (Jeremiah 5)*

The Lord called for someone to run throughout the city to see if there was even a single person who had repented so He could pardon that person. He longed to forgive but His people "refuse to take correction." They rejected the words of the prophets the Lord send to warn them (Jeremiah 5:12-13). Because of this stubborn refusal to repent, the Lord has a word for His servant Jeremiah:

*[14] Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of hosts:  
"Because you have spoken this word, behold, I am making  
my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood,  
and the fire shall consume them. (Jeremiah 5)*

The words of Jeremiah, like a fiery judgement of God, would judge His people of wood. This was the calling of Jeremiah. He was to announce disaster and destruction. God announced to the people of Judah that He was bringing a nation from afar who would bring great devastation to them:

*[15] Behold, I am bringing against you a nation from afar,  
O house of Israel, declares the LORD.  
It is an enduring nation; it is an ancient nation,  
a nation whose language you do not know,  
nor can you understand what they say.  
[16] Their quiver is like an open tomb;  
they are all mighty warriors.*

*[17] They shall eat up your harvest and your food;  
they shall eat up your sons and your daughters;*

*they shall eat up your flocks and your herds; they shall eat up your vines and your fig trees; your fortified cities in which you trust they shall beat down with the sword.” (Jeremiah 5)*

This foreign nation would strip Judah of her harvest, her sons, her daughters, her flocks, her herds, her vines and fig trees, and her fortified cities. They would have nothing left.

In Jeremiah 7, the Lord told the prophet to go to the temple in Jerusalem and preach to those who came to worship.

*[7:1] The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: [2] “Stand in the gate of the LORD’s house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the LORD. [3] Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. [4] Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.’ (Jeremiah 7)*

“Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place” (verse 3). These were bold words for Jeremiah to preach to those who were coming to worship. The people who came to worship had taken for granted that they would live out the rest of their lives in this land and worship at this temple. Jeremiah was telling them, however, that if they didn’t change how they lived, God would take it all from them. These were difficult words for these worshippers to accept.

Jeremiah went on to tell the people who came into the temple that day just how severe their punishment would be if they did not amend their ways:

*[33] And the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the beasts of the earth, and*

*none will frighten them away. [34] And I will silence in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, for the land shall become a waste. (Jeremiah 7)*

How difficult it was for these “good” people coming to worship to hear these words! They could not grasp what he was telling them that day. The Lord described their response to Jeremiah’s prophecies in Jeremiah 8:6-8:

*[6] I have paid attention and listened,  
but they have not spoken rightly;  
no man relents of his evil, saying,  
‘What have I done?’*

*Everyone turns to his own course,  
like a horse plunging headlong into battle.  
[7] Even the stork in the heavens knows her times,  
and the turtledove, swallow,  
and crane keep the time of their coming,  
but my people know not the rules of the LORD.*

*[8] “How can you say,  
‘We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us’?  
But behold, the lying pen of the scribes has made it into  
a lie. (Jeremiah 8)*

“I have paid attention,” they said. “What have we done,” they asked. They did not see themselves as sinners. They believed they were religious people coming to worship the Lord. They did not see themselves as God saw them. They had lost all sense of right and wrong. Jeremiah told them that they felt no shame and did not know how to blush (Jeremiah 8:12).

In Jeremiah 9-11 God revealed the sins of His people. Through Jeremiah, He told them that they were an adulterous, treacherous, and deceitful people (9:2-3). Though they were religious, they did not know God (9:3). God saw

them as deceivers, slanderers, and oppressors (9:4-6). God accused His people of being idolatrous Baal worshippers whose pagan gods were as numerous as the streets in Jerusalem (see Jeremiah 9:1; 10:1; 11:13). Their spiritual shepherds did not seek God (Jeremiah 10:21). How would you feel if one Sunday morning you heard these words from the pulpit of your church about yourself?

As you can imagine, those who heard Jeremiah did not like what he had to say. It wasn't long before Jeremiah began to feel the bitterness of the people toward him and his message. In Jeremiah 11 we read:

*[18] The LORD made it known to me and I knew;  
then you showed me their deeds.*

*[19] But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter.  
I did not know it was against me they devised schemes,  
saying,*

*"Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off  
from the land of the living,  
that his name be remembered no more." (Jeremiah 11)*

The people Jeremiah preached to, began to devise schemes to destroy him. They hated him for what he taught. From Jeremiah 11:21 we discover that it was the people of Anathoth (his home town) who sought to kill Jeremiah. God, in fact, warned Jeremiah not to trust the people them:

*[6] For even your brothers and the house of your father,  
even they have dealt treacherously with you;  
they are in full cry after you; do not believe them, though  
they speak friendly words to you." (Jeremiah 12)*

To illustrate the sin of the people, God told Jeremiah to buy a linen loincloth. He was to wear this loincloth but never to wash it. After some time, the Lord told him to take his unwashed loincloth to the Euphrates River and hide it under a rock. After many days, the Lord told Jeremiah to

return to the Euphrates and retrieve his loincloth. When Jeremiah did, he discovered that it was “good for nothing” (Jeremiah 13:7). The Lord then told Jeremiah that this is what would happen to his people. They had been the pride of the Lord, but they refused to be cleansed of their sin and as a result would be taken away into exile where their pride would be broken (see Jeremiah 13:9).

We discover in Jeremiah 14:13 that other prophets ministered at the same time as Jeremiah in Jerusalem and the surrounding region. These prophets prophesied a different message from Jeremiah:

*[13] Then I said: “Ah, Lord GOD, behold, the prophets say to them, ‘You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.’” (Jeremiah 14)*

Jeremiah appears to be alone in his proclamation of doom for Jerusalem. This only complicated matters for him as he had no support from these fellow prophets in what he preached. They told people that what Jeremiah said would not happen. When Jeremiah brought this to the Lord, the Lord told him:

*[14] ... “The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds. (Jeremiah 14)*

All Jeremiah had in those days was the Lord his God. The people of his home town wanted to kill him, and his fellow prophets contradicted his message. Jeremiah’s faith would have been stretched as he continued to trust in the word the Lord gave him to preach. His ministry would have been a lonely one. This loneliness and isolation were difficult for Jeremiah. We see his pain in chapter 15 when he openly pours out his soul to God:

*[16] Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts. [17] I did not sit in the company of revelers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone, because your hand was upon me, for you had filled me with indignation. [18] Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail? (Jeremiah 15)*

Notice how Jeremiah told God that he sat alone because God's hand was upon him (verse 17). He spoke about an unceasing pain and an incurable wound refusing to be healed. The prophetic ministry was not what Jeremiah had expected. It was a painful and lonely ministry. Added to this was the fact that Jeremiah was forbidden by the Lord to have a wife (Jeremiah 16:1). He was not to attend funerals (Jeremiah 16:5), nor was he to attend any feasts (Jeremiah 16:8). This only increased his loneliness and sense of isolation.

God did not promise that people would listen to Jeremiah. In fact, in Jeremiah 17:19 the Lord told him to stand at the People's Gate and warn the people about carrying a burden into the city on the Sabbath day. These words fell on deaf ears. The people did not listen to Jeremiah's warning:

*[23] Yet they did not listen or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck, that they might not hear and receive instruction. (Jeremiah 17)*

There would be no crowds repenting of their sin. There would be no one gathering to hear Jeremiah preach. Instead, they would turn their backs on him and consider him to be a fool.

When people would not listen to his words, Jeremiah illustrated his message. On one occasion he went to the potter's house to watch him make a jar. When the clay did not cooperate with the potter, he simply reshaped it into something else. God used this to show Jeremiah that He had the right to do whatever He wanted with His uncooperative people (see Jeremiah 18). On another occasion, Jeremiah took a pottery jar and broke it in pieces before the people to communicate what God would do to the city of Jerusalem (see Jeremiah 19:10ff).

These messages only served to intensify the bitterness of the people toward Jeremiah and his ministry. In Jeremiah 20 Pashhur the priest had Jeremiah arrested, beaten, and put in stocks to humiliate him. Jeremiah's response to this event is recorded in verse 7:

*[7] O LORD, you have deceived me,  
and I was deceived;  
you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed.  
I have become a laughingstock all the day;  
everyone mocks me.*

*[8] For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout,  
"Violence and destruction!"  
For the word of the LORD has become for me a re-  
proach and derision all day long.*

*[9] If I say, "I will not mention him,  
or speak any more in his name,"  
there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in  
my bones,  
and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.*

*[10] For I hear many whispering.  
Terror is on every side!  
"Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" say all my close  
friends,  
watching for my fall. "Perhaps he will be deceived;*

*then we can overcome him  
and take our revenge on him.” (Jeremiah 20)*

There was a strange relationship between Jeremiah and the word he spoke. This word burned in his bones. There were times when he didn't want to speak what God was giving him to say but he could not hold in that word. The word he spoke made him a laughingstock. It caused people to hate him and seek his life. Those who heard him preach wanted to see him dead. This was a weighty burden on Jeremiah, and there were times when he was overwhelmed. Listen to his deeply felt grief in Jeremiah 20:

*[14] Cursed be the day on which I was born!  
The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed!  
[15] Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father,  
“A son is born to you,” making him very glad.  
[16] Let that man be like the cities that the LORD overthrew  
without pity;  
let him hear a cry in the morning and an alarm at noon,  
[17] because he did not kill me in the womb;  
o my mother would have been my grave, and her womb  
forever great.  
[18] Why did I come out from the womb to see toil and  
sorrow,  
and spend my days in shame? (Jeremiah 20)*

Those who seek to be God's spokesmen would do well to count the cost of such a ministry. Jeremiah literally wanted to die because of the difficulty of his ministry.

Jeremiah prophesied that Babylon would invade and take Jerusalem captive. He told King Zedekiah that any resistance to Babylon would be futile (Jeremiah 21:4). In fact, Judah would remain in captivity for seventy years before the Lord punished Babylon and set His people free from their oppression (see Jeremiah 25:8-12). God's



people, according to Jeremiah, would be brought back from their captivity (Jeremiah 16:14-15). The day was coming when God would raise up a "Branch" from the line of David

*[5] "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. [6] In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.' (Jeremiah 23)*

The name of that righteous Branch would be "The Lord is our righteousness." This is very likely a reference to the coming of the Lord Jesus who would reign as Lord over His people.

As the threat of Babylon became more real, Jeremiah preached the need to submit to their domination. He told his people that it was the will of God that Babylon invade and take them into captivity. He made it clear in his messages that any nation that did not submit to Babylon would be punished by God:

*[8] But if any nation or kingdom will not serve this Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, I will punish that nation with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence, declares the LORD, until I have consumed it by his hand. (Jeremiah 27)*

As you can imagine, these words were considered treasonous. The prophet Hananiah opposed what Jeremiah was preaching.

*[1] In that same year, at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fifth month of the fourth year, Hananiah the son of Azzur, the prophet from Gibeon,*

*spoke to me in the house of the LORD, in the presence of the priests and all the people, saying, [2] "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. (Jeremiah 28)*

Hananiah contradicted Jeremiah and preached another message. In Jeremiah 28:15-16, Jeremiah confronted Hananiah and told him that because he was not teaching the truth, he would die before that year was over. Hananiah would die that year as Jeremiah predicted. This would have been a sign to the people of the truth of Jeremiah's prophecy.

By this time, Babylon had invaded Judah and taken some of its citizens as prisoners. The city of Jerusalem was still intact, but Babylon would return to destroy it and take more captives. Jeremiah recounts the story of this final invasion and devastation of Jerusalem in Jeremiah 52.

In Jeremiah 29, the prophet wrote a letter to this first wave of exiles who were in Babylon. In this letter, he gave the instructions of the Lord for them as they lived in exile.

*[4] "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: [5] Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. [6] Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. [7] But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah 29)*

According to Jeremiah, it was the will of the Lord that his people settle down and enjoy their lives in exile. Jeremiah would go on to tell them that they would remain in exile for seventy years:

*[10] "For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. (Jeremiah 29)*

God's people would not leave Babylon until these seventy years were over. While the prospect of remaining in this foreign land may not have been very encouraging, Jeremiah did give them something to look forward to. He told his people that the Lord would restore them and bring them back to their homeland.

*[7] I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel and rebuild them as they were at first. [8] I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me... [10] "Thus says the LORD: In this place of which you say, 'It is a waste without man or beast,' in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man or inhabitant or beast, there shall be heard again [11] the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of the LORD... (Jeremiah 33)*

In fact, Jeremiah promised that the Lord would establish a new covenant with them.

*[31] "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, [32] not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. [33] For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be*

*my people. [34] And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."*

This new covenant would not be like the old covenant they had broken (verse 32). This new covenant would be different in one key way—God's people would have His law written on their hearts, and they would all know God and be forgiven of their sin. In other words, those who were part of this new covenant would be a changed people who followed God not because some external law required that they do so, but because their hearts would be so changed that they would desire to follow him from the very core of their being. This was a work that could only take place when the Lord Jesus came and provided for the forgiveness of sin and placed His Holy Spirit in their lives as a seal of guarantee that they were indeed his not only in name but also in heart.

To symbolize the restoration of Israel, while the Babylonians were invading, Jeremiah purchased a field in his own hometown. He told those who wondered why he would buy a field when the Babylonians were about to conquer the land, that the day would come when it would be restored to them (see Jeremiah 32).

In the days leading up to the final invasion and conquest of Jerusalem, Jeremiah continued to prepare the people for what was ahead. Even though Babylon was at their doorstep, the people of Jerusalem refused to listen to him. In fact, we discover from Jeremiah 36:4-6 that he had been banned from preaching at the temple. To communicate his message, Jeremiah was forced to write out his prophecies and have his secretary read them in public. Even this did not spare him from insult. When his secretary Baruch read what Jeremiah had written on a scroll, the word was taken

to the king. After hearing what Jeremiah wrote, the king burned the scroll, rejecting its message (Jeremiah 36:23).

Despite the burning of his scroll, Jeremiah persisted in preaching the message of judgment and submission to Babylon. For this message, he was thrown in prison, falsely accused of deserting to the Babylonians, the enemy of Judah:

*[11] Now when the Chaldean army had withdrawn from Jerusalem at the approach of Pharaoh's army, [12] Jeremiah set out from Jerusalem to go to the land of Benjamin to receive his portion there among the people. [13]*

*When he was at the Benjamin Gate, a sentry there named Irijah the son of Shelemiah, son of Hananiah, seized Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "You are deserting to the Chaldeans." [14] And Jeremiah said, "It is a lie; I am not deserting to the Chaldeans." But Irijah would not listen to him, and seized Jeremiah and brought him to the officials. [15] And the officials were enraged at Jeremiah, and they beat him and imprisoned him in the house of Jonathan the secretary, for it had been made a prison.*  
*(Jeremiah 37)*

Shephatiah, Gedaliah, Jucal, and Pashur believed Jeremiah was "weakening the hands" of the soldiers and people left in the city through his message. Not content to have Jeremiah in prison, they felt he needed to be put to death and silenced completely. They approached King Zedekiah with their request:

*[4] Then the officials said to the king, "Let this man be put to death, for he is weakening the hands of the soldiers who are left in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man is not seeking the welfare of this people, but their harm." (Jeremiah 38)*

Zedekiah released Jeremiah into their hands, and the men had him thrown into a cistern and left to die. Were it not for the help of an Ethiopian in the king's court, Jeremiah would have died in the cistern. Ebed-Melech, however, rescued him, saving his life (see Jeremiah 38:7ff). From these details, we can see the intensity of hatred for Jeremiah and the message he preached in those final days of Judah.

In Jeremiah 39 we read how Jerusalem fell and its inhabitants were taken captive and led off into captivity in Babylon. Gedaliah was given the responsibility of governing the poor, unskilled people who were not worthy of captivity. Jeremiah was entrusted into the hands of Gedaliah and would remain with him in Judah (Jeremiah 39:11-14).

Apparently, the people of Judah were not content with their circumstances. Ishmael the son of Nethaniah was not satisfied with having Gedaliah being appointed by the Babylonians to be their governor. He and a group of ten men rose up in rebellion and killed the governor, his officials and the Babylonian soldiers around him (see Jeremiah 41:1-3).

This act of rebellion on the part of Ishmael threw the inhabitants of Judah into a panic. They feared the response of Babylon. They were not prepared to defend themselves against another Babylonian invasion. They approached Jeremiah and ask him to seek the Lord's will for them in these circumstances:

*[42:1] Then all the commanders of the forces, and Johanan the son of Kareah and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least to the greatest, came near [2] and said to Jeremiah the prophet, "Let our plea for mercy come before you, and pray to the LORD your God for us, for all this remnant— because we are left with but a few, as your eyes see us— [3] that the*

*LORD your God may show us the way we should go, and the thing that we should do.” (Jeremiah 42)*

Jeremiah consulted the Lord, and after ten days Jeremiah returned to tell the people that it was the will of the Lord that they remain in the Judah under the hand of God. They were not to fear the Babylonians because God would protect and keep them (see Jeremiah 42:10-11). The shattered faith of the people who remained in Jerusalem, however, was not strong enough to believe this word from the Lord. They had seen their nation crushed and could no longer trust God to be their deliverer.

Instead of trusting the Lord, the people rejected the words of Jeremiah, calling him a liar (see Jeremiah 43:2-4). They packed their bags and set out for Egypt to live under the protection of the Pharaoh (Jeremiah 43:5-7). The nation of Judah was abandoned. Jeremiah was forced to travel with them to Egypt.

There in the land of Egypt, the Lord spoke to Jeremiah:

*[8] Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah in Tahpanhes: [9] “Take in your hands large stones and hide them in the mortar in the pavement that is at the entrance to Pharaoh’s palace in Tahpanhes, in the sight of the men of Judah, [10] and say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will send and take Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will set his throne above these stones that I have hidden, and he will spread his royal canopy over them. [11] He shall come and strike the land of Egypt, giving over to the pestilence those who are doomed to the pestilence, to captivity those who are doomed to captivity, and to the sword those who are doomed to the sword. [12] I shall kindle a fire in the temples of the gods of Egypt, and he shall burn them and carry them away captive. And he shall clean the land of Egypt as a shepherd cleans his*

*cloak of vermin, and he shall go away from there in peace. [13] He shall break the obelisks of Heliopolis, which is in the land of Egypt, and the temples of the gods of Egypt he shall burn with fire.” (Jeremiah 43)*

God told His people that day that the sword they feared would reach out to them even there in Egypt. This great nation, in which they put their confidence would also be destroyed.

In the remainder of Jeremiah's prophecy, the Lord gave him words for the surrounding nations fulfilling His promise to make him a prophet to the nations. God revealed His judgement against Egypt (Jeremiah 46), Philistia (Jeremiah 47), Moab (Jeremiah 48), Ammon (Jeremiah 49:1-7), Edom (Jeremiah 49:8-22), Damascus (Jeremiah 49:23-27), Kedar and Hazor (Jeremiah 49:28-33), Elam (Jeremiah 49:34-39) and Babylon (Jeremiah 50:1-51:64).

The book of Lamentations is devoted to grieving over the destruction of the great city because of the sins of God's people. Jeremiah's message was a message of doom and judgement. God was going to break down and tear apart. Jeremiah, also, however, spoke of how God would also build up the nation when their day of judgement had passed. God would make a new covenant with His people, and they would be restored to Him and know Him with all their heart.

Jeremiah's ministry prepared his people for the judgement of the Lord and the renewal that would come about through that judgement. It cost him much to be a prophet at this time in Judah's history. He had no significant following of disciples. He was not allowed to have a wife or family. He was not allowed to rejoice with the people or comfort them in their times of mourning. There were times when the word he was called to preach was so heavy that he wanted to die. His message was rejected. The people of his home



town wanted to kill him. He was publicly mocked and ridiculed even being put in stocks. He did time in prison and was thrown into a cistern and left to die. He watched as the remaining inhabitants of Jerusalem abandoned the city and went to Egypt, not able to trust the Lord. Through it all, however, Jeremiah persevered, making him one of Judah's most faithful servants of God.

For Consideration:

Describe the days in which Jeremiah the prophet lived from a political and spiritual point of view. How do these days compare to today?

In Jeremiah 1:9 the Lord God revealed the purpose for the prophet. How would this purpose be worked out in Jeremiah's life and ministry?

What was Jeremiah's attitude toward Babylon, the enemy of Judah? How did this bring him into conflict with the people of his day? What would have been your response had you heard the message of Jeremiah in that day?

Was it always a joy for Jeremiah to preach the word of the Lord? Why or why not?

What did Jeremiah's letter to the exiles and his counsel to them teach us about God's discipline and the trials we face?

What kind of relationship did Jeremiah have with the other religious leaders in his community?

Jeremiah prophesied that God would establish a new covenant with His people that was very different from the old covenant. How did this new covenant come about? How was it different from the old covenant?

For Prayer:

Ask God to show you the purpose He has for your life. Ask Him to give you strength to be obedient to His will even when it is not easy.

Ask the Lord to teach you through the things you suffer. Thank Him that He refines us through the things He allows to come our way.

Take a moment to thank the Lord for the support He has given you in friends and fellow servants of God. Ask God to help you to be an encouragement to them in their struggle.

Thank the Lord for the new covenant that Jesus has established by his death and the coming of the Holy Spirit to be our guide and holiness. Ask God to help you to walk faithfully in this new relationship you have with Christ, the mediator of this new covenant of which Jeremiah spoke.

## Chapter 18 - Zephaniah

Zephaniah 1:1 gives us some insight into the time of Zephaniah.

*[1] The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, during the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah: (Zephaniah 1)*

Notice here that Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah of Judah. At this time, the northern kingdom of Israel had been taken captive by the Assyrians. This places Zephaniah roughly at the time of Jeremiah, although he does not appear to have prophesied in Judah for as long as Jeremiah whose prophetic ministry extended for another four Judean kings.

Josiah was a good king who restored the worship of God in Judah after a time of tremendous evil. Under the reigns of his father and grandfather, Judah had reached a spiritual low. The doors of the temple had been closed, and the people of Jerusalem were worshipping the god Baal. 2 Kings 23 describes what Josiah discovered when he opened the doors of the temple to have it cleansed:

*[4] The king ordered Hilkiah the high priest, the priests next in rank and the doorkeepers to remove from the temple of the LORD all the articles made for Baal and Asherah and all the starry hosts. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron Valley and took the*

*ashes to Bethel. [5] He did away with the pagan priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the high places of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem—those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and moon, to the constellations and to all the starry hosts. [6] He took the Asherah pole from the temple of the LORD to the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem and burned it there. He ground it to powder and scattered the dust over the graves of the common people. [7] He also tore down the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes, which were in the temple of the LORD and where women did weaving for Asherah. (2 King 23)*

Notice what was discovered in the temple of God in those days. Those who cleansed the temple had to remove “articles made for Baal and Asherah and all the starry hosts.” 2 Kings 23:7 tells us that they also had to tear down “the quarters of the male shrine prostituted, which were in the temple of the Lord where women did weaving for Asherah”. This meant that the temple of God had been completely defiled. Pagan idols and immoral practices were taking place in its walls.

Josiah was 8 years old when he became king. It would not be until the eighteenth year of his reign that he would order the repair and cleansing of the temple (age 26). This cleansing was accompanied by a great revival. Josiah would initiate a cleansing not only of the temple but of the entire nation. Until that time of revival, however, the people of God were worshipping Baal, Asherah, and the “starry hosts.”

It appears that Zephaniah began his ministry before the renewal that took place under Josiah. We draw this conclusion because of his condemnation of specific sins and the worship of foreign gods. We read, in the opening statement of his prophecy:

*[4] "I will stretch out my hand against Judah, and against  
all the inhabitants of Jerusalem;  
and I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal and  
the name of the idolatrous priests along with the priests,  
[5] those who bow down on the roofs to the host of the  
heavens,  
those who bow down and swear to the LORD and yet  
swear by Milcom, (Zephaniah 1)*

These two verses say a lot about the spiritual climate in Judah in those days. Reference is made here to the god Baal. Notice also, that Zephaniah speaks out against the "idolatrous priests." These priests were not serving the God of Judah but the pagan idols that were in the land. Zephaniah mentions people who would go up to the roofs of their houses and bow down in worship to the stars. Finally, he rebukes those who were swearing by Milcom, and by the Lord God of Judah. The days of Zephaniah were days of pagan worship and idolatry in Judah. These were days when God's people were described as:

*[6] those who have turned back from following the LORD,  
who do not seek the LORD or inquire of him." (Zephaniah 1)*

Zephaniah announced a day of judgement. That day of wrath was being prepared for a number of people. In Zephaniah 1:8 he declared the condemnation of the officials who dressed in foreign attire. The Lord would judge these officials because they no longer upheld the values of the Law of Moses but chose to follow foreign ways:

*[8] And on the day of the LORD's sacrifice—  
"I will punish the officials and the king's sons  
and all who array themselves in foreign attire.*

God would also punish those who stepped over the threshold and filled their master's house with violence and fraud:

*[9] On that day I will punish everyone  
who leaps over the threshold,  
and those who fill their master's house with  
violence and fraud.*

The phrase "leaps over the threshold" can be seen in two ways. The first is that this is a reference to the Philistine practice of not stepping on the threshold of the temple of Dagon (see 1 Samuel 5:5). If this is the case, then the verse would be further evidence of the influence of pagan worship in Judah.

The second way of understanding what Zephaniah is saying here is to see this as those who stole what was not theirs. These individuals leapt over thresholds of their neighbour's houses for violence and fraud. They harmed and stole from their neighbours and filled their houses with belongings that they obtained by theft and oppression. Either way, we see that God was also going to punish these people for their sin.

Zephaniah goes on in verse 11 to tell the people of Judah that the Lord would also punish the traders and merchants.

*[11] Wail, O inhabitants of the Mortar!  
For all the traders are no more;  
all who weigh out silver are cut off.*

Obviously, the reason for the punishment of these traders and merchants was because of their dishonest and corrupt dealings.

Finally, Zephaniah spoke against those who were complacent:

*[12] At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I  
will punish the men who are complacent,  
those who say in their hearts, 'The LORD will not do  
good, nor will he do ill.'*

The individuals described in verse 12 are those who said in their heart that God would do neither good nor ill. That is to say, they didn't really concern themselves with the evil in their society. They did not speak out against the sin. They did not have a passion for the glory of God and lived their lives as if God didn't exist. Zephaniah tells these individuals that God would search them out and punish them as well.

The prophet describes this day of judgement in Zephaniah 1:15-16:

*[15] A day of wrath is that day,  
a day of distress and anguish,  
a day of ruin and devastation,  
a day of darkness and gloom,  
a day of clouds and thick darkness,  
[16] a day of trumpet blast and battle cry  
against the fortified cities and against the lofty battle-  
ments. (Zephaniah 1)*

This day of the Lord was going to be a brutal day for His people. There would be great devastation and ruin. They would not be able to escape this judgement. Their silver and gold would mean nothing to them when that judgement fell. Their high position would not keep them from God's justice:

*[18] Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to de-  
liver them on the day of the wrath of the LORD.  
In the fire of his jealousy, all the earth shall be con-  
sumed; for a full and sudden end  
he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth. (Zepha-  
niah 1)*

Notice that Zephaniah speaks of "all the earth" being consumed and the end of "all the inhabitants of the earth." There was a partial fulfilment of this prophecy in the days when Babylon invaded Judah and stripped her of



everything she had. The greater realization of this prophecy, however, has yet to take place. The apostle Peter prophesied:

*[11] Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, [12] waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! (2 Peter 3)*

According to Peter, this earth will be destroyed in the day of the Lord's judgement (see also Revelation 21:1).

This day of the Lord's judgment would not be only for Judah. Zephaniah spoke about God's judgement of the Philistines (2:4-7), the Moabites and the Ammonites (2:8-11), the land of Cush (2:12) and the Assyrians (2:13-15). All these nations would experience the heavy hand of God's wrath because of their sin.

In Zephaniah 3, the prophet expresses the grief of the Lord over the sins of the people of Jerusalem. Here in these verses, he described them as a people who did not trust or obey the Lord:

*[2] She has not obeyed His voice,  
She has not received correction;  
She has not trusted in the LORD,  
She has not drawn near to her God. (Zephaniah 3)*

Jerusalem's leaders were as ravenous lions and wolves devouring those they were meant to serve:

*[3] Her princes in her midst are roaring lions;  
Her judges are evening wolves  
That leave not a bone till morning. (Zephaniah 3)*

Her spiritual leaders were no better. They were an insolent people who polluted the temple of God with their evil practices:

*[4] Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people;  
Her priests have polluted the sanctuary,  
They have done violence to the law. (Zephaniah 3)*

All the inhabitants of the city of Jerusalem were corrupt. They had rejected the Lord from the average citizen to the political and religious leaders.

Zephaniah prophesied, however, that while there was a day of judgement coming, the Lord would not abandon His people. God's people would be scattered from their land because of their sin but the day was coming, according to Zephaniah, when the Lord would gather these scattered people, and they would again go to Him and offer Him worship:

*[10] From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia  
My worshipers,  
The daughter of My dispersed ones,  
Shall bring My offering. (Zephaniah 3)*

On the day that they returned to Him, God would do a beautiful work in their midst. Zephaniah told his people that the Lord would restore a pure language to his people so that they would call on his name.

*[9] "For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language,  
That they all may call on the name of the LORD,  
To serve Him with one accord. (Zephaniah 3)*

God would remove the names of the pagan God's from the lips of His people. The discipline of God would have a purifying effect on His people. Their discipline would cleanse their hearts and minds and restore them to God.

God would remove from His people all who were proud and rebellious. Those who would not submit to him would no longer be part of His people nor would they be permitted to dwell on His holy mountain:

*[11] In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds*

*In which you transgress against Me;  
For then I will take away from your midst  
Those who rejoice in your pride,  
And you shall no longer be haughty  
In My holy mountain. (Zephaniah 3)*

What Zephaniah speaks about here is not just forgiveness of sin but complete removal of all who did not honour and love the Lord God of Israel. No one who was proud and rebellious would live on His holy mountain. This is very similar to what the apostle John said in Revelation 21:

*[25] Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). [26] And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. [27] But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. (Revelation 21)*

The scattered who returned to the Lord are described as those who did no unrighteousness:

*[13] The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness  
And speak no lies,  
Nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth;  
For they shall feed their flocks and lie down,  
And no one shall make them afraid." (Zephaniah 3)*

God would do a powerful work in the lives of these people. They would obey Him and walk with Him with a new heart. God would forgive their sins, and they would live in perfect security in His presence:

*[15] The LORD has taken away your judgments,  
He has cast out your enemy.  
The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;  
You shall see disaster no more. (Zephaniah 3)*

There would be a restoration of the relationship between God and His people. They would know the salvation and presence of God and delight His heart:

*[17] The LORD your God in your midst,  
The Mighty One, will save;  
He will rejoice over you with gladness,  
He will quiet you with His love,  
He will rejoice over you with singing." (Zephaniah 3)*

Zephaniah announced that the Day of the Lord was coming. That day would have a two-fold purpose. First, it would be a day when God judged the earth for its sin and rebellion. Second, it would also be a day of cleansing and healing for His people.

What is interesting about Zephaniah's prophesy about the Day of the Lord, is that it appears to have a double fulfillment. Of course, the initial fulfillment came when the city of Jerusalem was captured by the Babylonians and its inhabitants were taken away into captivity. There are, however, hints of an even greater judgement where, "in the fire of his jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed," and God would make a "sudden end" to "all the inhabitants of the earth" (Zephaniah 1:18).

What is true for the judgement of God also seems true for the renewal and restoration of His people. Zephaniah prophesied that those who were scattered would return to their land and bring their offerings to God (see Zephaniah 3:10). This did happen in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah when the king of Persia gave permission for the Jewish people to return to their homeland. The description, however of the spiritual condition of God's people in Zephaniah

3 seems to look forward to a time when no proud or rebellious person would live on God's Holy Mountain (3:11), where there would be no unrighteousness or lies (3:13), where all would live in one accord with a pure language (3:9), and all enemies will be cast out (3:15). There seems to be a connection between what Zephaniah prophesies and what the apostle John describes in Revelation about heaven and its inhabitants. Zephaniah announced a coming Day of the Lord. This day would be a day of judgement but also a day of tremendous hope and renewal for those who belonged to the Lord God.

For Consideration:

What were the spiritual conditions in Jerusalem during the days of Zephaniah?

What pagan practices were being observed in Judah in the days of Zephaniah? Are there any practices in the church today that are not from God?

Zephaniah announced a day of judgement and renewal for God's people. How did his prophecy come to pass for Jerusalem and its inhabitants?

What is the connection between the prophecy of Zephaniah and the vision of John in the book of Revelation?

For Prayer:

What are the spiritual conditions of your society today? Take a moment to bring your community to the Lord. Ask Him to convict of sin and bring healing and renewal to your community.

Take a moment to thank the Lord for the hope he gives of a time when righteousness will reign, and evil will be judged.

Ask the Lord to cleanse you from rebellion or complacency. Ask Him to give you a devoted heart that loves and willingly surrenders to Him.

Thank the Lord for men like Zephaniah who are willing to speak about the sins of our nations and churches.

Thank the Lord that He is willing to discipline those He loves to bring them to a place of deeper surrender and commitment to Him.



## Chapter 19 - Habakkuk

Very little is known about the prophet Habakkuk. In fact, all we know about him is contained in his book. The only clue we have to the date of the book is found in Habakkuk 1:5-6:

*[5] "Look among the nations, and see;  
wonder and be astounded.*

*For I am doing a work in your days  
that you would not believe if told.*

*[6] For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,  
that bitter and hasty nation,  
who march through the breadth of the earth,  
to seize dwellings not their own. (Habakkuk 1)*

Habakkuk 1:6 refers to the Chaldeans and the fact that God was raising them up to march through the "breadth of the earth to seize dwellings are not own" (verse 6). The Chaldeans were inhabitants of Babylon. The context of the book of Habakkuk seems to indicate that the nation of Judah was already experiencing oppression and loss. Because there is no reference, however, to the people of God being taken into exile by the Babylonians, it may be safe to assume that Habakkuk prophesied around the beginning of the Babylonian invasion of Judah.

Habakkuk begins his book with a question:

*[2] O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not  
hear?*



*Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? (Habakkuk 1)*

The prophet asks the Lord why He did not hear his prayers. Notice the reason for Habakkuk's prayers in verse 2. There was violence in the land and Habakkuk was not being spared from that violence. He went on in verse three to ask God another question:

*[3] Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong?*

*Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. (Habakkuk 1)*

As Habakkuk looked around him, he saw great trouble and pain. He saw people being plundered and their belongings were taken by force. We can picture the nation of Babylon invading the land and stripping away its wealth while God's people watched helplessly. Habakkuk cried out to the Lord in this chaos, but his prayers did not seem to move God or change their circumstances. He was perplexed and questioned why the Lord would allow this to happen to His people without stepping in and stopping their enemy.

The Lord answered the prophet in Habakkuk 1:5-11, but the answer left Habakkuk with more questions. God told Habakkuk that He was raising up the Babylonians to march through the earth and take territory that was not theirs (1:6). These Babylonians would bring judgement to the earth (1:7). That judgement would come swiftly and be fierce (1:8). No nation would be able to conquer them—this was not a wrath they could escape (1:10). God was using the Babylonians to execute His sentence on the earth.

As difficult as it was to accept the purpose of God, Habakkuk understood that the Lord God of Israel and Judah had every right to correct and punish His people for sin and rebellion. He confessed this in Habakkuk 1:12:

*[12] Are you not from everlasting,  
O LORD my God, my Holy One?  
We shall not die.*

*O LORD, you have ordained them as a judgment,  
and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof.  
(Habakkuk 1)*

Clearly, Habakkuk understood that God had appointed these Babylonians “as a judgement,” and established them to be a “reproof” and correction to the nations. While He understood that God was punishing the nations for their sin, Habakkuk’s struggle was that these Babylonians were no better than the people they were invading. Habakkuk questioned why God allowed evil Babylonians to “swallow up the man more righteous than he?” (Habakkuk 1:13)

*[13] You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and can-  
not look at wrong,  
why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when  
the wicked swallows up  
the man more righteous than he? (Habakkuk 1)*

Habakkuk 2:2 is an important verse. The verse is part of the Lord’s answer to Habakkuk’s question, but it is also his calling:

*[2] And the LORD answered me: “Write the vision; make  
it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. (Habakkuk  
2)*

This verse is a direct command of God to Habakkuk. Here the Lord told him to write down his vision. This is likely why we have a record of Habakkuk today. God told him to write down his struggle and the questions he had so that those who were struggling with the same problems would have a record of the answer of the Lord. We can be sure that Habakkuk was not the only one struggling with these questions. God wanted to use him to answer the questions of a confused people facing the harsh judgment of the day.

Habakkuk's burden was to make sense of this horrible judgement of God at the hands of the cruel Babylonians.

In answering Habakkuk's question, the Lord makes two significant points. The first point God makes is found in Habakkuk 2:4:

*[4] "Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him,  
but the righteous shall live by his faith. (Habakkuk 2)*

Speaking about the Babylonians, God agreed with Habakkuk and said: "Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him." In other words, the Babylonians were indeed proud and sinful people. They were not right with God.

Notice also, however, that God told Habakkuk that the righteous were to live by faith. If we live by faith, we do need an answer to everything God does. We simply trust Him. God is telling Habakkuk that while he did not understand why He did things the way He did, he was to trust Him. This was the word of God to the nation of Judah who faced this harsh opposition at the hands of the enemy. In reality, God was saying: "I know you don't understand what is happening to you right now but trust me, I know what I am doing."

The second point God made in His answer to Habakkuk is found in Habakkuk 2:6. Speaking to the Babylonians, God said:

*[6] Shall not all these take up their taunt against him, with scoffing and riddles for him, and say, "Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own— for how long? — and loads himself with pledges!" [7] Will not your debtors suddenly arise, and those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoil for them. [8] Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you, for the blood of man and violence to*

*the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. (Habakkuk 2)*

Babylon had heaped up "what is not his own" (verse 6) and plundered many nations (verse 8). The day was coming, however, when his debtors would "suddenly arise" (verse 7). These debtors would spoil Babylon (verse 7). The nations Babylon had plundered, would one day plunder them (verse 8).

God made it clear to Habakkuk that sinful Babylon was His instrument to judge the nations. Babylon would not be spared, however, from the same judgement. She would also have to give an accounting to God. She would also be judged in the end.

This answer of God seems to quieten the heart of Habakkuk. As he reflects on this two-fold response of God, he is moved to pray prophetically. In this prophetic prayer, Habakkuk speaks directly to God, but God gives Him an understanding of what was going to happen.

In his prayer, Habakkuk's speaks of a God who came in splendour and holiness to the earth. The earth trembled before His awesome majesty. He came to judge and punish the nations for their sin and evil. Notice, however, that God also came to bring salvation to His people:

*[13] You went out for the salvation of your people,  
for the salvation of your anointed.*

*You crushed the head of the house of the wicked,  
laying him bare from thigh to neck. Selah (Habakkuk 3)*

Through God disciplined His people, He would not forget them. He would bring His salvation. Through this judgement, God would purify His people. Habakkuk committed himself to wait on the Lord to bring justice and judgment on those who had invaded them:

*[16] I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the  
sound;*

*rottenness enters into my bones; my legs tremble be-  
neath me.*

*Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble  
to come upon people who invade us. (Habakkuk 3)*

While that time of waiting would not be easy, Habakkuk chose to keep his eyes focused on the Lord. By faith, he would wait for the Lord to accomplish His purpose and bring salvation to His people:

*[17] Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be  
on the vines,*

*the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food,  
the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in  
the stalls,*

*[18] yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the  
God of my salvation. (Habakkuk 3)*

God showed Habakkuk that He was in control, even amid the great confusion in his nation. He reminded him that the pathway to victory was by faith and confidence in God and His purpose. God would not abandon His people in this pain. He would punish and discipline, but ultimately, he would also bring salvation as His people waited on him.

Notice, finally in Habakkuk 3:19 that Habakkuk's prayer was set to music. This meant that it would be sung in the land and serve as a reminder to the people of God in their time of trouble. As this prayer was sung, it would have given direction and comfort to a people who, like Habakkuk could not make sense of what was happening in their nation. Habakkuk's prophesy, though very brief, was a powerful message that spoke directly to a confused people in a time of crisis.

His prophecy comes from his own weakness and misunderstanding. It reflects his own struggle and pain. God

used his struggle to speak to the nation. For some, the only way they would have known about this prophet was through his words put to music. We have nothing more from this prophet. His personal struggle was used, however, to speak prophetically to his nation at a very difficult time. It pointed them to the Lord and reminded them of his sovereign control and goodness.

For Consideration:

What is the historical context for the book of Habakkuk? What was happening in the nation at the time of his prophecy? What would have been the questions on the minds of the people of God in his day?

How do you respond to difficult circumstances you do not understand?

Can God use the unbeliever to accomplish His purpose on this earth?

What was the purpose of Habakkuk's prophecy?

What role does faith have in the trials that we face in our lives?

How did God use the confusion and questions of Habakkuk to speak to the nation?

### For Prayer

Take a moment to thank the Lord that He is bigger than the tragedies you experience in life.

Are you struggling with things in your life you do not understand? Ask the Lord to give you the faith Habakkuk speaks about in this book. Confess your doubts, anxieties, and lack of confidence in God.

Ask the Lord to give you strength and patience to wait on Him as He unfolds His purpose in your life. Ask Him to keep you faithful and focused on Him in these difficult times.

## Chapter 20 - Ezekiel

*[1:1] In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. [2] On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), [3] the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the Chebar canal, and the hand of the LORD was upon him there. (Ezekiel 1)*

Ezekiel 1:1-3 teaches us several details about the prophet. Notice first that Ezekiel was “among the exiles by the Chebar canal.” The Chebar canal was in Babylon. This means that Ezekiel was among those who were taken from Judah and brought to Babylon as a captive. These Jewish captives were not all taken to Babylon at the same time. In the days of King Jehoiachin, Babylon captured the city of Jerusalem and took many Jews captive to Babylon. At that time the Babylonian king removed King Jehoiachin from the throne and put his uncle Zedekiah in his place (see 2 Kings 24:10-17). King Zedekiah, however, would eventually rebel against this Babylonian authority. This brought Babylon back to Jerusalem to deal with the rebellion. This time the Babylonians destroyed the city of Jerusalem and took the remaining Jews captive, leaving only the poorest and unskilled in the land (see 2 Kings 25:1-21).



It appears from the context of Ezekiel's prophecy that he went into exile with the first group under Jehoiachin. We come to this conclusion for two reasons. First, because in chapters four and five of his prophecy, Ezekiel prophesies about the destruction of Jerusalem that took place in the days of King Zedekiah. He was already in captivity in Babylon when he gave this prophecy.

The second reason we understand that Ezekiel went into captivity with the first group of exiles under Jehoiachin is because of what is said in verse 2. Here Ezekiel identifies himself with the "exile of King Jehoiachin":

*[2] On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin) (Ezekiel 1)*

Ezekiel prophesied from Babylon. God sent him with the first wave of exiles. The Jews of captivity would not be without a prophet to speak the word of God. The other detail of some significance in the opening verses of Ezekiel is that he was the son of Buzi, the priest. Ezekiel was a priest by profession. We understand from Ezekiel 24:18 that Ezekiel was married but his wife died in Babylon.

From Ezekiel 1:2 we discover that it was the fifth year of exile that Ezekiel was called as a prophet. In Ezekiel 29:17 we read:

*[17] In the twenty-seventh year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me: (Ezekiel 29)*

Notice that the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel in the twenty-seventh year. This may indicate that he served as a prophet for over twenty-two years. He would prophesy to a nation that had lost everything and was being held captive in a foreign land. He lived among them and experienced what they were experiencing.

Ezekiel's call to ministry is found in chapters one to three of his book. Ezekiel introduces this call by telling us:

*[1] In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. (Ezekiel 1)*

The heavens were opened to Ezekiel and he saw a vision of God. It is not our purpose in the context of this study to examine this vision of God in detail. Ezekiel records what he saw in that vision in Ezekiel 1:4-28. What is of interest to us here is the response of the prophet to what he saw:

*[28] Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking. (Ezekiel 1)*

The glory of the Lord was so powerful in that vision that Ezekiel fell on his face before Him. The God of glory revealed Himself to Ezekiel in exile. In Ezekiel 2:1 told Ezekiel to stand on his feet so that He could speak to him. The prophet obeyed, and God spoke:

*[3] And he said to me, "Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. [4] The descendants also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' (Ezekiel 2)*

Notice two details in these verses. First, God told Ezekiel that He was sending him to the people of Israel. God would use other prophets to speak to many nations. Ezekiel's ministry, however, would be to the Jews. It would be easy at this time to speak out against the Babylonians because

of what they had done. This was not God's call. God made this clear to the prophet in Ezekiel 3:

*[5] For you are not sent to a people of foreign speech and a hard language, but to the house of Israel— [6] not to many peoples of foreign speech and a hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to such, they would listen to you. (Ezekiel 3)*

Ezekiel's calling was to minister to his own people.

Second, God told Ezekiel that he was to go to his people and say to them, "Thus says the Lord GOD." In other words, the message Ezekiel was to speak was from God. He was to speak with authority. The words he spoke were not his own words. They were given to him by God, and he was to share them clearly to his people. God wanted to speak to His people at this time of exile. He wanted to teach them and encourage them in their discipline. Ezekiel would be His spokesman at this time.

God told Ezekiel that He was going to make him a watchman for his people:

*[17] "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. [18] If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. [19] But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul. (Ezekiel 3)*

As a watchman, Ezekiel had a great responsibility. God would give him a warning, and he was to speak that warning to the people of his day. If he refused to share what

God had given him with the people, their blood would be on his hands. From that moment onward, Ezekiel was to dedicate himself body and tongue to the Lord and to speak what God gave him. Listen to what the Lord said to the prophet in Ezekiel 3:24-27:

*[24] But the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and he spoke with me and said to me, "Go, shut yourself within your house. [25] And you, O son of man, behold, cords will be placed upon you, and you shall be bound with them, so that you cannot go out among the people. [26] And I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be mute and unable to reprove them, for they are a rebellious house. [27] But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' He who will hear, let him hear; and he who will refuse to hear, let him refuse, for they are a rebellious house. (Ezekiel 3)*

From these verses, we can see the dedication that was required for the ministry of Ezekiel. God told him that he would shut him up in his house and bind him with cords so that he could not go out among the people. God would also bind up his tongue so that he could not speak to the people until God opened his mouth and gave him a word to speak. Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel's ministry would be a lonely one. His body and tongue were to be entirely devoted to the Lord and to proclaiming His words alone.

We have examples of how God would use Ezekiel's body and tongue in chapters four and five of his prophecy. In chapter 4 God asked Ezekiel to act out the siege of Jerusalem. He was to take a brick and engrave a picture of the city on it (4:1). He was to place siege works around the image of the city (4:2-3). We are not told where the prophet was to set this representation of the siege of Jerusalem, but it would have been visible for people passing by to see.

As part of this image, God then told Ezekiel to lie on his left side for 390 days to represent the time that Israel would be in captivity—one day for every year. When he had completed this, he was to lay on his right side for forty days to represent the time that Judah would be in captivity—also one day for every year. To help Ezekiel to accomplish this task God told him:

*[8] And behold, I will place cords upon you so that you cannot turn from one side to the other, till you have completed the days of your siege. (Ezekiel 4)*

God required the use of Ezekiel's tongue but also of his body. Ezekiel would not only preach the message of God with his lips but also demonstrate this message in his body.

We have another example of how God used Ezekiel's body to communicate His message to the people. He was to take his hair and divide it into thirds. He was to strike one-third of the hair with a sword in front of the people. The second third he was to scatter to the wind. The final third was to be kept safe in his robe. Of that final third, however, he was to take some hair and burn them. God asked him to do this to show the people what would happen to them in the days to come (see Ezekiel 5:1-4).

As we come to chapter 8 of Ezekiel, we find the reason why God was angry with His people. On this occasion, the elders of Israel were at his home in Babylon. We are not told why they came to see the prophet but clearly God had a purpose. That purpose was to show them the reason for their exile and the discipline of the Lord.

As the elders sat before Ezekiel, the Lord gave him a vision. In the vision, "a form that had the appearance of a man" (8:2) appeared to Ezekiel and brought him in his vision to the city of Jerusalem (8:3). There at the north gate,

Ezekiel saw a pagan image. The man in his vision then told Ezekiel:

*[6] And he said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel are committing here, to drive me far from my sanctuary? But you will see still greater abominations."*

True to his word, the man took Ezekiel in the vision to the entrance of the temple court where there was a hole in the wall. He told Ezekiel to dig into the wall. When the prophet obeyed, he found an entrance. He was told to go through the hole (8:7-8). Ezekiel 8:10 describes what Ezekiel saw:

*[10] So I went in and saw. And there, engraved on the wall all around, was every form of creeping things and loathsome beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel. [11] And before them stood seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them. Each had his censer in his hand, and the smoke of the cloud of incense went up.*

Engraved on the walls were images of unclean beasts. Seventy elders stood there worshipping these images.

The man in Ezekiel's vision then took him to the north entrance of the temple. There at that entrance, Ezekiel saw women weeping for the pagan God Tammuz (8:14). In the inner court of the temple, Ezekiel watched twenty-five men facing the east worship the sun (8:16). When Ezekiel had seen all these things, the man in his vision spoke to him and said:

*[17] Then he said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations that they commit here, that they should fill the land with violence and provoke me still further to anger? Behold, they put the branch to their nose. [18] Therefore I will act in wrath. My eye will not spare,*

*nor will I have pity. And though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them.” (Ezekiel 8)*

Ezekiel's vision seems to continue in chapter 9. Here he heard the Lord call for executioners to come forward. Among the executioners was a man with a writing case. The Lord issued a command to the man with the writing case:

*[4] And the LORD said to him, “Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.” (Ezekiel 9)*

When this man had marked the foreheads of those who were grieved over the evil in their society, the executioners went through the city slaughtering those who did not have a mark. God revealed to Ezekiel and the elders of the nation why He was so angry with His people. They had fallen into deep sin and rebellion against God but had no shame or grief over this rebellion. God used Ezekiel to show His people the reason for their punishment.

God used Ezekiel to proclaim a message of deliverance and security to those in exile. Listen to his words in Ezekiel 11:

*[16] Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: Though I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they have gone.’ [17] Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.’ (Ezekiel 11)*

Notice two details from these verses. First, God promised to be a “sanctuary” to His people in the countries where they had been scattered (verse 16). It would have been an

encouragement to the exiles to know that God had not left them. He would protect them in their discipline so that they would be preserved for His future purpose.

Notice second, that God promised to gather His people from the various countries where they had been scattered and return them to Israel. The day was coming when their land would be restored to them (verse 17).

Through Ezekiel, the Lord also promised that He would not only restore Israel's homeland, but He would also restore their fellowship with Him. He would give them a new heart and spirit, and they would again be His people and walk in intimacy with Him.

*[18] And when they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations. [19] And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, [20] that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. (Ezekiel 11)*

In these words of Ezekiel, the exiles were given hope.

Ezekiel 12 is a fascinating passage that predicts in detail what would happen to King Zedekiah, the last king of the divided kingdom. Remember that Ezekiel was in exile, but many of the Jews remained in Jerusalem under the leadership of King Zedekiah. In Ezekiel 12, the Lord spoke to Ezekiel and told him to act out an escape from the city.

*[3] As for you, son of man, prepare for yourself an exile's baggage, and go into exile by day in their sight. You shall go like an exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house. (Ezekiel 12)*



God told Ezekiel to dig a hole through the wall and bring his bags through that hole. He was to do this in the sight of the people:

*[4] You shall bring out your baggage by day in their sight, as baggage for exile, and you shall go out yourself at evening in their sight, as those do who must go into exile. [5] In their sight dig through the wall and bring your baggage out through it. (Ezekiel 12)*

The next day, when all the people were wondering what this meant, the Lord gave Ezekiel the interpretation:

*[10] Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: This oracle concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are in it.' [11] Say, 'I am a sign for you: as I have done, so shall it be done to them. They shall go into exile, into captivity.' [12] And the prince who is among them shall lift his baggage upon his shoulder at dusk and shall go out. They shall dig through the wall to bring him out through it. He shall cover his face, that he may not see the land with his eyes. [13] And I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare. And I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans, yet he shall not see it, and he shall die there. (Ezekiel 12)*

Ezekiel told the people that what he had done symbolized what would happen to the prince or king of Israel. Ezekiel prophesied that he would make an escape through a hole in the wall. The result of this attempted escape, however, would be that he would be captured, and his face covered so that he could not see the land. He would be brought to Babylon where he would die.

Listen to the description of what took place when King Zedekiah of Judah rebelled against Babylon:

*[25:1] And in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, Nebuchadnezzar*

*king of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem and laid siege to it. And they built siegeworks all around it. [2] So the city was besieged till the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. [3] On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. [4] Then a breach was made in the city, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, by the king's garden, and the Chaldeans were around the city. And they went in the direction of the Arabah. [5] But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho, and all his army was scattered from him. [6] Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they passed sentence on him. [7] They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes and put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in chains and took him to Babylon. (2 Kings 25)*

Ezekiel prophesied precisely what took place. He told the people how the king would attempt an escape through a hole in the wall. He explained to them how he would be captured and brought to Babylon. He also predicted how the king would be blinded and now see the land. We can only imagine the response of the people to the arrival of King Zedekiah in Babylon, just as Ezekiel has prophesied.

We discover another vital aspect to the ministry of Ezekiel to the exiles in Ezekiel 14. Here in chapter 14, the elders of Israel came to see the prophet. We are not told why these elders had come, but we can assume that they had come to hear the word of the Lord or to get the word of the Lord about a situation they were facing.

As the elders sat before Ezekiel, the word of the Lord came to him:

*[2] And the word of the LORD came to me: [3] "Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them? (Ezekiel 14)*

God revealed something very important to Ezekiel that day. These elders were living in sin. They had idols in their heart. We are not told what those idols were but the fact that they were described by the Lord as being in their hearts may indicate that to all outward appearance these elders were fine men, but their hearts were not right with God. God exposed this sin to Ezekiel.

Ezekiel was to speak to these elders and call them to repent:

*[6] "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations. (Ezekiel 14)*

Even in exile, Israel and her leaders were still turning from God and following idols. This may not have been done openly, but from Ezekiel 14 we understand that God saw their hearts and was not pleased with them. God exposed the hearts of these men who came to inquire of the Lord. With human eyes, we see that the elders had come to seek the Lord. With the eyes of God, however, we see the evil hearts of these elders lusting after false gods. This was part of Ezekiel's call as a prophet. He was to expose the hidden sin of God's people and challenge them to be made right with God. If the people of God were to be healed and restored, it was necessary that this hidden sin be addressed.

To reveal the importance of addressing their sin, God gave Ezekiel a series of pictures in chapters fifteen to seventeen.

In chapter 15, the Lord asked Ezekiel about the wood of a vine. He asked him particularly what the wood of a vine could be used for. He reminded him that the wood of a vine could not be used even as a peg to hang a vessel on because it was not strong enough. The only thing that the wood of the vine was good for was to be used in a fire. God compared His sinful people to a vine. Because they were sinful, they were of no use to Him. He would have to discipline them in the fire of His judgement.

*[6] Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (Ezekiel 15)*

God also compared His people to a faithless bride in chapter 16. In this chapter, he spoke to Ezekiel about how he found Israel like a young child abandoned at birth. His heart was moved with compassion for her, and He provided all her needs so that this young child grew up to be a beautiful young woman. God then entered a covenant with her as His bride. As a husband to Israel, the Lord God blessed her abundantly with every good thing. She lacked nothing she could have ever wanted.

Israel, however, was an unfaithful wife. In fact, she is described in verse 15 as a whore:

*[15] "But you trusted in your beauty and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whorings on any passerby; your beauty became his.*

Because of her unfaithfulness, God would judge her. She would be separated from Him and His blessings.

Chapter 17 describes Israel as a vine planted beside abundant waters. Because of its ideal location, it flourished and spread out its branches. It had every potential of producing wonderful fruit:

*[8] It had been planted on good soil by abundant waters, that it might produce branches and bear fruit and become a noble vine.*

Even though God planted the nation of Israel in this beautiful location and promised to bless them, Ezekiel 17:7 describes what took place instead.

*[7] "And there was another great eagle with great wings and much plumage, and behold, this vine bent its roots toward him and shot forth its branches toward him from the bed where it was planted, that he might water it. (Ezekiel 17)*

In Ezekiel 17:7 the prophet saw a picture of an eagle with great wings and plumage. When Israel saw this eagle, they bent their roots toward him and put their trust in him instead of trusting God. This great eagle was likely the nation of Egypt. When Babylon invaded Judah, Jeremiah the prophet told them to trust in the Lord and remain in the land. They chose, however, to seek the help of Egypt instead. They trusted Egypt more than the word of the Lord. Through the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord told the people:

*[17] Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company will not help him in war, when mounds are cast up and siege walls built to cut off many lives. (Ezekiel 17)*

The nation in which God's people put their trust would not help them in the end.

In these chapters, Ezekiel pictured his people as a useless and wandering vine and an unfaithful bride. God wanted His people to understand why they were being punished. Ezekiel taught them about their sin. It was sin that separated them from the Lord and His blessings. It was only by confessing and rejecting this sin that the people of God could be restored to fellowship.

There was a lot of confusion in the minds of God's people about this matter of sin and the reason God was punishing them. Listen to the words of the Lord through Ezekiel in chapter 18:

*[18:1] The word of the LORD came to me: [2] "What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? [3] As I live, declares the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. [4] Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die. (Ezekiel 18)*

From these verses, we understand that there was a proverb being repeated by the people of God in exile – "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (verse 2). The image is quite clear. If you have ever eaten something sour, you can recall the effect that this had in your mouth. This proverb, however, paints a picture of a father eating sour grapes but the impact was felt not by him but by his children.

What the people were saying by repeating this proverb was that their fathers had sinned, but they were suffering the consequences of what their ancestors had done. In other words, they did not see themselves as sinners deserving the punishment of God. They recognized the sins of their parents but could not see this sin in themselves.

This becomes even more clear in verse 25 when Ezekiel challenged their concept of the justice of God in punishing them:

*[25] "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? [Ezekiel 18]*

Ezekiel needed to correct the misconceptions and false theology of his people. They could not see how they deserved their punishment. They did not understand their sin. Instead, they felt that God was punishing them for their parent's sins.

One of the biggest lessons the people in exile needed to learn was that they were sinners. They just could not see this. Ezekiel needed to teach them, as a prophet, how God saw them. He had to place them before the standard of God and His requirements. They measured their lives by a different standard. Ezekiel told the people that God's punishment was merited:

*[4] Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die. (Ezekiel 18)*

It was the soul that sinned that would die. It was not God who was unjust but His people. This is a problem that continues to exist in our day. Our society sets its own standard and measures itself against that standard instead of submitting to the purpose of God. God will judge us by His standard and not by our ideas of right and wrong. His Word alone is the measurement by which we will be judged. Ezekiel's ministry was a difficult one. He was called to reveal the truth of God's requirements to a people who really did not even understand why they were being punished.

In Ezekiel 20, the elders came again to Ezekiel to inquire of the Lord. God used this opportunity to teach his people about their personal sin and guilt. Remember that they had been saying that it was because of the sins of their fathers that they were being punished. On this occasion, the Lord spoke through Ezekiel:

*[3] "Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD, Is it to inquire of me that you come? As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will not be*

*inquired of by you. [4] Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Let them know the abominations of their fathers. (Ezekiel 20)*

Notice particularly here that God told Ezekiel to speak to these elders about the “abominations of their fathers.” In the words that followed, Ezekiel spoke freely of the ways in which the fathers of these elders had rebelled against God. While these elders would not have had an issue with what Ezekiel was telling them about their fathers, Ezekiel did not stop there. He went on in verse 18 to speak of the children also:

*[18] “And I said to their children in the wilderness, ‘Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor keep their rules, nor defile yourselves with their idols. [19] I am the LORD your God; walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules, [20] and keep my Sabbaths holy that they may be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God.’ [21] But the children rebelled against me. They did not walk in my statutes and were not careful to obey my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; they profaned my Sabbaths. “Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the wilderness. (Ezekiel 20)*

Ezekiel reminded the elders that the Lord brought a challenge to the next generation as well. He set out His law to the children of these fathers and called them also to walk in obedience. Like the fathers, however, the children also rebelled against the Lord and chose not to walk in His laws. The result was that the children would be punished just as the fathers. Ezekiel ends his exhortation to the elders with these words:

*[30] “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and go whoring after their detestable things?*



*[31] When you present your gifts and offer up your children in fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols to this day. And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will not be inquired of by you. (Ezekiel 20)*

Ezekiel told these elders that they had defiled themselves, like their fathers, “to this day” (verse 31). In other words, they continued in the rebellion of their fathers and would be judged by God for that rebellion. These elders needed to see their sin was as great as the sins of their fathers. They had been blinded to their own failures and shortcomings. Ezekiel sought to expose their sin. Until they recognized this sin in themselves, there could be no victory.

According to Ezekiel, there was still hope of great renewal among the people of God:

*[33] “As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out I will be king over you. [34] I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out. [35] And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face. [36] As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you, declares the Lord GOD. [37] I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. [38] I will purge out the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against me. I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD. (Ezekiel 20)*

Ezekiel prophesied that the day was coming when the Lord would stretch out His mighty hand in anger. On that day the

Lord would judge His people "face to face" (verse 35). This judgement would be very personal. Each person would have to answer for his or her sin. God would purge out the rebels from among them and restore His people to their land. This restoration, however, would only come as the people of God faced their sin. This time of exile would force people to face this horrible reality of their sinful state before God.

Repeatedly in his prophecy, Ezekiel confronts the sins of his people. We have an example of this in Ezekiel 22:

*[6] "Behold, the princes of Israel in you, every one according to his power, have been bent on shedding blood. [7] Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; the sojourner suffers extortion in your midst; the fatherless and the widow are wronged in you. [8] You have despised my holy things and profaned my Sabbaths. [9] There are men in you who slander to shed blood, and people in you who eat on the mountains; they commit lewdness in your midst. [10] In you men uncover their fathers' nakedness; in you they violate women who are unclean in their menstrual impurity. [11] One commits abomination with his neighbor's wife; another lewdly defiles his daughter-in-law; another in you violates his sister, his father's daughter. [12] In you they take bribes to shed blood; you take interest and profit and make gain of your neighbors by extortion; but me you have forgotten, declares the Lord GOD. (Ezekiel 22)*

Speaking of the leaders of the nation Ezekiel says:

*[26] Her priests have done violence to my law and have profaned my holy things. They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. [27] Her princes in her midst are*

*like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain. [28] And her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' when the LORD has not spoken. (Ezekiel 22)*

In fact, the Lord sought for even one man in the land who would stand for Him and the principles of righteousness but there was no one:

*[30] And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none. (Ezekiel 22)*

How different Israel's view of herself was from God's view of her. This barrier needed to be broken down. Israel's eyes needed to be opened to the reality of her sin and evil. God called Ezekiel to prophesy and teach His people about this sin.

One of the most challenging lessons Ezekiel had to teach is found in chapter 24 of his book.

*[15] The word of the LORD came to me: [16] "Son of man, behold, I am about to take the delight of your eyes away from you at a stroke; yet you shall not mourn or weep, nor shall your tears run down. [17] Sigh, but not aloud; make no mourning for the dead. Bind on your turban, and put your shoes on your feet; do not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men." [18] So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died. And on the next morning I did as I was commanded. (Ezekiel 24)*

As a lesson to His people, the Lord allowed Ezekiel's wife to die. As the "delight of his eyes," losing his wife would have been a painful experience for the prophet. Notice,

however, that God told Ezekiel that he was not to sigh out loud or mourn for her publicly. Instead, he was to go on with life as usual, without the customary period of mourning. This was to show the people that God would take away what was precious to them as well. They would lose their temple and their homes. Their sons and daughters would be separated from them, but they would not have the time to mourn or grieve because they would be brought into captivity. While Ezekiel was currently in exile when he spoke these words, he was prophesying about the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians and the removal of the remainder of Jews from their homeland.

What is significant here is that Ezekiel needed to be willing to lose what was most precious to him to convey the message God was trying to get across to His people. He acted out this message at the cost of his wife. I have met individuals who longed to have the gift of prophecy. This, however, is not a gift to be taken lightly, for God demands the surrender of our tongues, our lives and all that belongs to us. As a prophet, Ezekiel had to surrender all these things to the Lord.

Ezekiel's ministry was focused on the people of God in exile, but the Lord did use him to communicate with other nations as well. In chapters 25-32 God gave His servant a series of messages for a number of nations. We will not take the time here to discuss these messages. Suffice it to say that God spoke to the nations of Ammon (25:1-7), Moab and Seir (25:8-11; 35:1-15), Edom (25:12-14), Philistia (25:15-17), Tyre (26:1-28:19), Sidon (28:20-24), Egypt (29:1-32:32) and Gog (38:1-39:24).

It is in Ezekiel 33:21 that we read about the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians as Ezekiel had predicted. In this same chapter, the Lord pleads with His people through Ezekiel to turn to Him:

*[11] Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? (Ezekiel 33)*

Ezekiel not only taught his people about sin but pleaded with them to submit to the discipline of the Lord and repent. He showed his people that their God was a compassionate God who would forgive and restore all who came to Him. In fact, God grieved over the condition of His people. He was angry with those who had been given the responsibility to shepherd the nation. It was because of these evil and self-centred leaders that the people of God wandered and were led astray. Their spiritual leaders had failed Israel, so God made a promise to them that day:

*[10] Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them. (Ezekiel 34)*

God promised to be a shepherd for His people. He promised to rescue them from evil shepherds who were taking advantage of them. While the people of God had been scattered because their spiritual shepherds had failed to care for them, God would seek them out and restore them to their land and its blessings:

*[11] "For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. [12] As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. [13] And I will bring them out from the peoples and*

*gather them from the countries and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. (Ezekiel 34)*

The God who disciplined His people would also care for them and restore the fullness of their blessing. Under the care of the Great Shepherd, God's people would flourish and again experience great security:

*[25] "I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. [26] And I will make them and the places all around my hill a blessing, and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing. [27] And the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase, and they shall be secure in their land. And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke, and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them. (Ezekiel 34)*

The day was coming, according to Ezekiel when the mountains of Israel would again yield their fruit:

*[8] "But you, O mountains of Israel, shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to my people Israel, for they will soon come home. [9] For behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown. (Ezekiel 36)*

God would draw near to His people to renew and revive them. Ezekiel describes this in chapter 36:

*[25] I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. [26] And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of*

*flesh. [27] And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36)*

Note the work God would do in His people. He would cleanse them from their sin and idolatry. He would give them a new heart and spirit. In other words, He would transform their character. He would take their old, hard and sinful heart away and replace it with a heart that was responsive to Him. He would put His Holy Spirit in them enabling them to walk in His ways. They would no longer be the same. This transforming work of God would take place as the Spirit of God indwelt and empowered them to serve their God. It was this Spirit who would enable them to walk with God in a way they could never have walked in their human strength.

In Ezekiel 37 God gave Ezekiel a vision of a valley filled with dry bones. In this vision, the Lord asked the prophet to speak to these bones. When Ezekiel did, life was given to the bones, and they were again covered with flesh and lived. God told him that this was a picture of what He wanted to do for His people. Sin had stripped them of blessing and left the spiritually dead. God would place His Spirit in them and restore their life. We can imagine just how encouraging it must have been for the people to hear that God had such an excellent plan for them and that he had not abandoned them in their exile. Ezekiel's ministry to the exiles was to give them hope of a future and remind them that God had not left them.

Ezekiel goes into detail in chapters 40-46 about a vision he saw of a temple. While we do not have the time in this chapter to go into detail about this temple, what is important to note is that impact this would have had on the people of God in exile. It would have given them hope. They would again worship the Lord God freely in their

homeland. Once again, they would celebrate His goodness and bring their offerings to Him.

What is significant about this vision of the temple of Ezekiel is what he saw in chapter 47. From the back door of the temple, water began to flow. In his vision, Ezekiel was led through the water. It grew deeper and deeper until he could no longer walk in it but had to swim (see Ezekiel 47:3-6). Of note are these words of Ezekiel:

*[9] And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. (Ezekiel 47)*

The river that flowed from this temple of God brought life wherever it went. Ezekiel went on to say:

*[12] And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing." (Ezekiel 47)*

The river gave life to fruit trees of all kinds. The leaves on these trees did not wither nor did the fruit ever fail. In fact, the fruit of these trees and their leaves brought healing for all who tasted them.

Ezekiel prophesied of a time when from the nation of Israel, God would pour out His Spirit and bring blessing to all people. Since the time of Pentecost in the book of Acts, the good news of the gospel continues to flow across the world bringing life and renewal to people of every nation. God would not only rescue His people from exile in Babylon, but in time, He would use them to bring salvation and hope to the entire earth.



As a prophet in exile, Ezekiel spoke for the Lord to his fellow exiles. He helped them understand the discipline of the Lord and what God wanted to accomplish in that discipline. He corrected wrong theology and behaviour by teaching and rebuking both the people and their leaders. He offered them great hope and reassured them that the God who disciplined them would not forget them. God had a beautiful purpose for those who loved Him. Ezekiel was an important figure in the instruction and discipline of God's people in their time of exile. Jeremiah the prophet prepared God's people for their discipline. Ezekiel guided them through it.

For Consideration:

Ezekiel was among the first captives to arrive in Babylon. Why was it important that God have a spokesman in exile?

God demanded the use of both Ezekiel's tongue and his body to speak and act out the message He had for His people. What sacrifices did Ezekiel make as a prophet? How willing are you to surrender your tongue and body to the Lord to do with as He pleases?

The people of God in exile failed to see their own sin. Ezekiel helped them to understand what God saw in them. How easy is it to be blind to our own failures and shortcomings? How important is it that we see these shortcomings?

How did Ezekiel bring hope to the exiles? What did he reveal about the future purpose of God for the nation as a whole? How did that purpose affect us today?

For Prayer:

Take a moment to thank the Lord for the people He has sent you in your time of need. Ask God to show you if you can be God's spokesman or spokeswoman to those who are struggling under a heavy burden.

Ask God to give you the grace to surrender yourself mind, body, and words to Him for His use. Ask forgiveness for any lack of surrender in your life.

Ask God to show you if there are sins that you do not see in your life right now. Ask Him to give you victory over those sins so that you can move forward in your spiritual walk with Him.

Thank the Lord for the promises in the Bible that give you hope for a bright future in the presence of the Lord forever.



## Chapter 21 - Daniel

Daniel lived under the reign of King Jehoiakim in Judah. According to Daniel 1:1 it was in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim that Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem. Like Ezekiel, Daniel was among the first people taken into exile to Babylon. Daniel 1:3 gives us a clue as to the identity of the prophet:

*[3] Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, [4] youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.*

Nebuchadnezzar commanded his chief eunuch to bring youths from the royal and noble class of Jewish society to the king's court to teach them the literature and language of the Babylonians. Among these youth were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah from the tribe of Judah. This shows us Daniel was likely from a noble family who had influence and wealth in Judah.

These chosen men were fed at the king's expense and educated in the Babylonian culture, literature, and language for three years. After those three years, they would appear before the king, and he would determine how they could best serve his cause in the court. Daniel was given a new

name. This new name was Belteshazzar meaning “Bel protects his life”. Bel was a Babylonian god. It is interesting to note that the name Belteshazzar occurs about 10 times in the book of Daniel. The first occurrence is in chapter 1 where we are told that his name was changed. Five times he is called Belteshazzar by the Babylonian king. The remaining four occurrences of the name appear in the phrase “Daniel who was called Belteshazzar.” For the most part, the prophet is simply referred to as Daniel.

We learn another significant detail about the prophet in Daniel 1:8:

*[8] But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank.*

*Therefore, he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.*

Daniel made a commitment to follow the Jewish dietary laws found in the law of Moses. Although he was in exile, he chose to be obedient to His God. Remember that Daniel had been taken from Israel by force as a youth and was now in a foreign land learning another language and culture. Despite this, he refused to forget his God and his Jewish heritage. When the king offered him the finest foods in Babylon, Daniel refused and requested permission to eat only what was permitted by his Jewish faith—in this case, he chose a diet of vegetables and water (Daniel 1:12). After a ten-day trial, the king's steward granted them this privilege. (Daniel 1:15-16).

As Daniel walked faithfully with God, God blessed him with the ability to learn the literature and wisdom of Babylon (1:17). In fact, when Daniel and his friends were interviewed by the king, he found them ten times more understanding and knowledgeable in Babylonian literature and culture than his magicians and enchanters:

*[20] And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.*

God gave Daniel this knowledge of the culture, language, and literature of Babylon. He became an expert in this field. This qualified him to serve in the king's court. Daniel 1:21 tells us that he served the king until the first year of King Cyrus:

*[21] And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus. (Daniel 1)*

According to the IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary Daniel held this position for about 65 years:

*1:21. first year of Cyrus. This is most likely a reference to the first year of Cyrus' reign over Babylon, which began in October 539 B.C. This would mean that Daniel's tenure of service extended over a sixty-five-year period. (Walton, John H., Matthews, Victor H., Chavalas, Mark W., The IVP Bible Background Commentary, Old Testament: Comments on Daniel 1:21, Laridian: Cedar Rapids, 2000).*

There is one more detail about Daniel that is important for us to consider in chapter 1:

*[17] As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. (Daniel 1)*

We have already seen that the Lord blessed Daniel with great knowledge and understanding in Babylonian culture, literature, and language. Daniel 1:17 tells us that He also gave him an understanding of visions and dreams. Daniel's God-given ability to interpret dreams and visions would be the means by which God communicated His message through him in Babylon.

In Daniel 2, King Nebuchadnezzar had some dreams that troubled him greatly. To understand what they meant, the king called for his magicians, enchanters, and sorcerers. They the king to share his dreams with them so they could interpret them. Not trusting these men and their interpretation the king said:

*[5] "The word from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins. [6] But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. Therefore show me the dream and its interpretation."  
(Daniel 2)*

Nebuchadnezzar demanded that the magicians tell him not only what the dream meant but also what he dreamed. He told them that if they could not do both, they would be killed, and their homes destroyed. It is clear how much this dream troubled Nebuchadnezzar. He could not entrust it to people who would make up a false interpretation. He needed to know the truth. Because the men could not tell him what he had dreamed and its interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar commanded that all wise men of Babylon be destroyed (Daniel 2:12)

When the soldiers came to collect Daniel and his friends to kill them, Daniel asked the king's guard why the king had made this decree. The captain of the guard explained the matter to Daniel. Daniel requested an appointment with the king to interpret the dream (Daniel 2:16). In preparation for this, Daniel asked his friends to pray that God would reveal both the dream and interpretation to him. God answered that prayer, and Daniel requested an audience with the king to interpret his dream (Daniel 2:24).

Standing before the king, Daniel told him that it was his God who had given him the interpretation and that this

same God was speaking to Nebuchadnezzar about the things that were to take place in his future. Daniel went on to describe in detail the dream the king had seen (see Daniel 2:31-35). He then proceeded to tell him what the Lord was saying about his future and the kingdoms that would rise after him. When Daniel finished, the king fell on his face, commanding that offering and incense be offered to him (see Daniel 2:46). In doing so, he was treating Daniel like a god. He then promoted Daniel by making him "ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon" (Daniel 2:48).

Later, in Daniel 4, we read that King Nebuchadnezzar had a second dream. When the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and astrologers could not interpret it, the king explained the dream to Daniel and committed its interpretation to him. The Lord again revealed its meaning to Daniel. The interpretation, however, was not an encouraging one for the king. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that God would humble him because of his pride by driving him from among mankind and making him live like an animal (see Daniel 4:24-25). Daniel offered a word of advice to the king that day:

*[27] Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity."*  
(Daniel 4)

Daniel encouraged the king to repent of his sin by showing mercy to the oppressed. Daniel's prophetic interpretation of that dream came true and is recorded for us in Daniel 4:28-33.

*[28] All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. [29] At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, [30] and the king answered and*



*said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" [31] While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, [32] and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." [33] Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws. (Daniel 4)*

Sometime later when Belshazzar was king in Babylon, he was celebrating with his officials and drinking from cups taken from the temple of Jerusalem. As they were drinking from these cups, fingers of what appeared to be a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall. This greatly disturbed the king, and he called for his magicians to read what was written and interpret it. Not of these wise men, however, could give the meaning of the words. This made Belshazzar even more afraid.

It was the queen who suggested that they call Daniel to interpret the meaning of the words. Daniel was summoned and appeared before Belshazzar. Daniel reminded King Belshazzar of Nebuchadnezzar's fate because of his pride. He also told the king of how he had blasphemed the name of the God of heaven by drinking from the holy vessels of the temple of Jerusalem. Having revealed his sin, Daniel went on to interpret the four words that had been written on the wall. He told him that the words meant that his days were numbered as king. He had fallen short of his obligations before God. His kingdom was going to be

divided and given to the Medes and Persians. The fulfillment of this prophecy did not take long in coming. Daniel 5:30-31 tells us:

*[30] That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. [31] And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old. (Daniel 5)*

The Medes and Persians would conquer Babylon and become the dominant empire in its place. The king of this empire was Darius the Mede. Darius setup 120 administrators throughout his kingdom. Over these administrators were three high officials to whom these administrators were accountable. Daniel was one of these officials (Daniel 6:1). It appears that Daniel distinguished himself above all the officials and administrators to such an extent that Darius planned to set him over the whole kingdom (Daniel 6:3). This stirred up the jealousy of the other officials. They immediately began a campaign to find fault with him. The only way they could do this was in connection with his relationship to his God, for they understood him to be a very spiritual man.

Together they conspired to trap Daniel. Approaching the king, they suggested that for a period of thirty days no one in the kingdom was to make a petition to any god except to King Darius. In making this suggestion, they were calling all people of the land to recognize Darius as a god. The officials asked the king to sign a document to make this a law that could not be changed. Anyone who disobeyed this law would be thrown into a den of lions. King Darius signed the document, and it became law for those thirty days.

Despite the law, Daniel continued to pray three times a day to the Lord God. He did this openly and without fear of what might happen to him. This was precisely what these jealous officials were anticipating, and they were more than happy to report it to the king.

When the king heard that Daniel had broken the law, he was distressed and tried to figure out a way to deliver him. When he could not find a way, he submitted to having Daniel thrown to the lions. He did so with great regret, however, for he understood now the false motivations of his officials and their jealousy. God protected Daniel that night, and when the king found him alive in the morning, he had the officials and their families thrown into the same den where they were devoured. That event had a powerful impact on King Darius. He saw that the God of Daniel was the true God. In fact, Daniel 6:26-27 tell us that he made a national decree as a result of this experience. That decree read:

*[26] I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. [27] He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions."*  
(Daniel 6)

In this decree, King Darius of Persia demanded that people in all his dominion tremble before the God of Daniel. The Persian King Darius declared Daniel's God to be a "living God" who lived forever. He recognized that the kingdom of Daniel's God was eternal. He was a God who rescued His people and did great signs and wonders on the earth and in the heavens.

It is interesting to note how Daniel used his prophetic gift as he served under these three kings. While the prophets we have examined to this point heard directly from the Lord and communicated that message to the people, there is another dimension in the ministry of Daniel. God spoke directly to these foreign kings but brought Daniel an interpretation of what they had heard from God. Daniel acts as a prophetic interpreter of dreams visions and signs.

This method of communicating God's prophetic heart would have been much easier for these pagan kings to accept. Along with their dreams and visions, God placed a deep sense of urgency and fear. They wanted to hear the interpretation. Daniel would not be prophesying to people whose ears were closed. These foreign kings begged him to explain these troubling dreams, visions, and signs. When Daniel enlightened them, they knew that what he spoke was from God.

Daniel also had dreams and visions of his own. The first of these recorded dreams is found in Daniel 7:1-8. It took place in the first year of King Belshazzar of Babylon (verse 1).

### The Four Beasts

In this dream, Daniel saw four beasts coming out of the sea. The first of these beasts was a lion with eagle's wings (verse 4). The wings of this lion were plucked off. The second beast was like a bear. This bear was ferocious with three ribs between its teeth, an indication that it had just devoured its prey. This bear was told, "Arise, devour much flesh" (verse 5). The third beast was like a leopard with four wings of a bird on it back. This leopard had four heads and great power. The final beast was terrifying and "exceedingly strong." It had ten horns. Daniel saw another horn grow up among them which had the eyes of a man and a mouth boasting of great things. When this horn appeared three of the other horns were plucked up by the roots.

Eventually, in Daniel's dream, thrones were set out, and someone Daniel called the "Ancient of Days" took his seat (verse 9). Daniel describes him dressed in clothing as white as snow with hair like pure wood. His throne was filled with fiery flames. The Ancient of Days had thousands and thousands of servants, and a great multitude of people

stood before him (verse 10). The Ancient of Days sat as a judge. Books were opened. Judgement was passed, and the fourth beast was killed, and his body destroyed by fire. Dominion was taken away from the other three beasts, but their lives were prolonged for a time (verse 11).

After this, Daniel saw the clouds of heaven open and one he described to be the “son of man” appeared and stood before the Ancient of Days. The Ancient of Days gave him dominion, glory and a kingdom. All peoples, nations, and languages were to serve him (verse 14). The kingdom given to the “son of man” is described to Daniel in his dream as an “everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:14).

Daniel was perplexed about this dream and its meaning. He inquired about the interpretation and was told:

*[17] ‘These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. [18] But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.’ (Daniel 7)*

Daniel was told that the dream spoke of four kings that were going to be raised up in the coming years. He was also told that after these four kings another kingdom would come. This would be the kingdom of the saints of the Most High. Unlike these first four kingdoms, however, this kingdom of the Most High would be forever and ever.

While there are many details in this dream we cannot discuss in this brief chapter on Daniel, let me make some comments about this important dream. There can be no question that the “son of man” to whom glory, and an eternal kingdom were offered is the Lord Jesus Christ. The Father—the Ancient of Days, bestowed this honour on Him. He is the king of this spiritual kingdom that crosses every language and cultural barrier. Before the Lord Jesus

appeared on this earth, however, other powerful nations had their time. In Daniel's day, the Babylonians were the dominant power. They were defeated, by the Medes and Persians. Daniel would serve under Darius the Mede when he conquered Belshazzar, the Babylonian king as prophesied by the writing he saw on the wall. Under Alexander the Great, the Medes and Persians would be defeated, and the nation of Greece would become the next great world power. Greece would eventually be conquered by the Romans. It was during the time of the Romans that the Lord Jesus would be born. God was showing Daniel that four great nations would arise before the coming of the Lord Jesus who would set up His own kingdom.

### The Ram and the Goat

The second vision of Daniel is recorded in Daniel 8 and took place in the third year of King Belshazzar's reign, about two years after the first vision of the four beasts. In this second vision, Daniel saw a ram standing by the Ulai canal. The ram had two horns, but one was longer than that other. This ram was charging toward the west, the north and the south and no one could stand against its power.

As Daniel watched, a male goat came from the west and began to sweep across the earth. This goat had a single horn between his eyes. When the goat saw the ram with two horns, he ran into him with great force, breaking its two horns and trampling on him.

The goat became very powerful, but his horn was also broken and four other horns took its place. From among them a little horn would grow up and become "exceedingly great" (verse 9). It would lift itself as high as heaven. Under its authority truth was thrown to the ground (verse 12), and

the holy sanctuary of God was trampled underfoot (verse 13).

Daniel was again perplexed as to the meaning of the dream. God gave him the interpretation. Daniel was told that the ram with the two horns was the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians.

*[20] As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia. (Daniel 8)*

The goat that charged and conquered the Medes and Persians was the kingdom of Greece:

*[21] And the goat is the king of Greece. And the great horn between his eyes is the first king.*

It is generally understood that this great horn between the eyes of the Greek goat was Alexander the Great who forcefully conquered one nation after another. After the death of Alexander the Great, his kingdom was divided into four parts and governed by Seleucus, Cassander, Ptolemy, and Lysimachus. These were the four horns that replaced the one that was broken on the Grecian goat:

*[22] As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, four kingdoms shall arise from his nation, but not with his power. (Daniel 8)*

Finally, from among those four kings, another would arise (a small horn). This king would grow in strength and evil. It would be under this king that truth would be cast to the ground and the sanctuary trampled. This demonically inspired and empowered king is described in Daniel 8:24-25:

*[24] His power shall be great— but not by his own power; and he shall cause fearful destruction and shall succeed in what he does and destroy mighty men and the people who are the saints. [25] By his cunning he shall make*

*deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall become great. Without warning he shall destroy many. And he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes, and he shall be broken—but by no human hand. (Daniel 8)*

As an evil king, he would rule with a power that was not his own (verse 24). He would cause fear and destroy many saints. Deceit would prosper under his hands, and he would lift himself up. He would even revolt against the Prince of princes (the Lord God). In the end, however, he would be defeated. His defeat, however, would not be by human hands.

Many commentators see the fulfilment of this prophecy in the person of Antiochus Epiphanes whose desire was to exterminate Judaism. Historically, it is believed that he died from an infestation of worms in direct fulfilment of the prophetic dream of Daniel that he would not die of human hands. The dream of Daniel revealed the struggle that was to come in the coming years for the Jews under Greek domination.

During this time of exile, Daniel reflected on the prophecy of Jeremiah and discovered an important word:

*[9:1] In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans— [2] in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. (Daniel 9)*

Jeremiah prophesied that the exile of the people of God would last seventy years. This stirred Daniel's heart to pray and fast for God's mercy on His people. In his prayer, recorded in Daniel 9:3-19, Daniel confessed Israel's guilt before the Lord and recognized that God was utterly just in



punishing His people for their sin. He pleaded, however, that God would turn His anger and wrath from the city of Jerusalem and look on His people in their time of need (Daniel 9:17-19).

As Daniel prayed for his people, God sent an angel to speak with him about what was to come and how God would answer his prayer. The angel, Gabriel spoke to Daniel saying:

*[22] ... "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. [23] At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved. Therefore consider the word and understand the vision. (Daniel 9)*

Gabriel went on to tell Daniel that God had decreed seventy weeks to put an end to and atone for sin. At that time, He would bring in everlasting righteousness. The word "week" is not so strictly defined in the Hebrew as it is in the English language. The word refers to seven or a group of seven days or years. Most commentators agree that when Daniel refers to seventy weeks, he is referring to seventy groups of seven years or 490 years. Gabriel was telling Daniel that within a period of 490 years, God would atone for sin and bring everlasting righteousness.

Gabriel divided these seventy weeks or 490 years into three distinct periods of time. The first 7 weeks (49 years) would see the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem (Daniel 9:25). This would take place under the administration of Ezra and Nehemiah.

After the next sixty-two (434 years) weeks passed, an anointed one would be killed (Daniel 9:26). These 434 years bring us to the time of Jesus and His crucifixion.

The final week (7 years) would see great desolation in the city of Jerusalem and an end to sacrifices and offerings

(Daniel 9:27). This may refer to the great persecution that broke out in Rome against the Jews. By the year 70 AD, the temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Romans ending Jewish sacrifices and offerings as Gabriel had predicted.

Daniel is given a vision of future events past the coming of Jesus the Messiah to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD. We can only imagine how this would have impacted Daniel who had been praying that God would release his people from bondage. Through the words of the angel Gabriel, Daniel learned that while God would answer his prayer and liberate His people from bondage to rebuild their homeland, within less than 500 years, it would all be destroyed again. In fact, the revelation that Daniel received was a significant burden to him and caused great conflict in his soul. This is evident in Daniel 10 where we read:

*[10:1] In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a word was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar. And the word was true, and it was a great conflict. And he understood the word and had understanding of the vision.*  
*[2] In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks.*  
*[3] I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the full three weeks. (Daniel 10)*

Daniel mourned for three weeks after the revelation of Gabriel. Revelations given to prophets are not always pleasant. Sometimes the weight of these revelations takes a significant toll on the lives of God's spokesmen.

In Daniel 11, the Lord God told Daniel that four Persian Kings would reign until the time of Alexander the Great and the defeat of the Persians at his hand (11:1-2). Alexander's kingdom would be divided into four at his death but not to his own children (11:4). It is not in the interest of this study

to go into detail about chapter 11. Suffice it to say that the Lord God revealed to Daniel what was to happen in the kingdom of Greece after the death of Alexander the Great. These details include who these rulers would marry, the battles they would fight, and the result of those battles. The chapter predicts alliances that would be made between kings and the betrayals that would take place in those years. A comparison of ancient history the prophecy of Daniel reveals stunning similarities.

While much of what Daniel was told in those days could be understood to refer to events that took place up to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, there appears to be another deeper sense to his prophecy as well. A comparison between the vision of John in the book of Revelation and the words of Daniel reveals some striking similarities. There are elements to the prophecy of Daniel that we have yet to see fulfilled. Listen to what he said in Daniel 12:

*[1] "... And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. [2] And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. [3] And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. [4] But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase." (Daniel 12)*

Daniel prophesied of a time of trouble for the people of God. This trouble was not related to the exile he was in at that time of writing, but a time after the death of the anointed one, the Lord Jesus. He declared a time of deliverance for those whose name was found written in "the book" and a time when those who had been buried would

raise from the dead, either to eternal life or eternal shame. This would happen at a time when people travelled to and fro, and knowledge was increasing (Daniel 12:4). While the destruction of Jerusalem may have been a partial fulfilment to Daniel's prophecy, the resurrection and final judgement have yet to take place. Daniel's prophesy continues, therefore, to look forward to the return of the Lord and the final judgement.

Daniel was likely a young man from a wealthy Jewish family when he was taken into exile. God gave him great wisdom and understanding, and he mastered the culture, literature, and language of the nation to which he had been exiled. Though he was skilled in Babylonian culture and literature, Daniel's commitment was to the Lord God of Israel. He honoured and walked with God all the days of his life. God blessed this and gave him a position of authority in the land of Babylon.

As a prophet, Daniel was gifted in the interpretation of dreams. We have no record of him preaching or teaching. He experienced visions which he wrote down. The dreams he interpreted and those he experienced himself, related to the future of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. They pointed directly to the time when an "Anointed One" would come to bring forgiveness and peace. His prophetic dreams seem to move past the time of Jesus Christ to the Day of resurrection and Final Judgment when God would bring final victory over all His enemies. While his visions would have been an encouragement to the people of God, Daniel does not appear, in this book, to speak directly to the Jewish people in exile. Instead, God seems to use him to speak directly to his foreign captors. Daniel's prophetic ministry would have a powerful impact, particularly on the Babylonian kings.

For Consideration:

What would it have been like for a young man from a rich family in Israel to be stripped of his wealth and taken captive by a foreign power? How did Daniel deal with this? How do you deal with tragedy?

How would you describe Daniel's commitment to God? Give some examples of his willingness to suffer for His God.

How did God use Daniel's gift of interpreting dreams to impact the life of the Kings of Babylon?

Does God still speak through dreams and visions today?

Many of the prophets before Daniel preached the word God gave them. This does not seem to be the case for Daniel. How would the interpretation of the king's dreams capture his attention more than preaching?

We have no record of Daniel preaching sermons or teaching the Word of God in the book of Daniel, yet Daniel's ministry before the kings of Babylon was an important and powerful one. What gifts has the Lord given you? How can you use those gifts for His glory?

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to give you the faithfulness of Daniel, even when you find yourself in less than ideal circumstances.

Ask the Lord to show you how you can be faithful with the gifts He has given you. Thank Him that the gift to interpret dreams was so powerfully used in the life of Daniel.

Thank the Lord that He knows every detail that will take place in the years to come. Thank Him that the future of this world is in His hands and that nothing takes Him by surprise. Thank Him that your life is also in His hands.



## Chapter 22 - Obadiah

The book of Obadiah is the shortest of all the prophet books in the Bible. In fact, we know nothing about him as a person. He does not speak of himself at all in his prophecy.

Obadiah's prophecy concerns the nation of Edom. We learn from Genesis 25 that the Edomites were the descendants of Esau:

*[30] And Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!" (Therefore his name was called Edom.)*

The word Edom refers to the colour red. Genesis 25 recounts the story of how Esau was out in the field hunting and came home exhausted. His bother, Jacob, was home cooking a red stew when Esau returned from his hunting trip. Esau asked Jacob for some of the stew. Jacob only agreed to give it to him if Esau sold him his birth right. Esau agreed and sold his birth right to Jacob for a pot of red stew. His descendants would bear the name "Red" (Edom), the colour of the stew that cost them their birth right.

There would be tension and bitterness between Jacob's descendants (Israel) and Esau's descendants (Edom) throughout their history. In Numbers 20 we read how, after being released from slavery in Egypt, Moses led his people



through the wilderness. Arriving at Kadesh, Moses wanted to pass through the land of the Edomites as he travelled on his way to the Promised Land. Numbers 20:14-18 describe the conversation between Moses and the King of Edom:

*[14] Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom: "Thus says your brother Israel: You know all the hardship that we have met: [15] how our fathers went down to Egypt, and we lived in Egypt a long time. And the Egyptians dealt harshly with us and our fathers. [16] And when we cried to the LORD, he heard our voice and sent an angel and brought us out of Egypt. And here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your territory. [17] Please let us pass through your land. We will not pass through field or vineyard, or drink water from a well. We will go along the King's Highway. We will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through your territory." [18] But Edom said to him, "You shall not pass through, lest I come out with the sword against you."*  
(Numbers 20)

The king of Edom refused to let Israel step on his soil and threatened to attack them with his army if they did. We can see the bitterness of Edom toward Israel in this declaration to Moses.

The prophet Ezekiel had some words to say to Edom in his prophecy (referred to here as Mount Seir, the mountain range that ran through Edom's territory).

*[35:1] The word of the LORD came to me: [2] "Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir, and prophesy against it, [3] and say to it, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, Mount Seir, and I will stretch out my hand against you, and I will make you a desolation and a waste. [4] I will lay your cities waste, and you shall become a desolation, and you shall know that I am the*

*LORD. [5] Because you cherished perpetual enmity and gave over the people of Israel to the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, at the time of their final punishment (Ezekiel 35).*

Of note here is what Ezekiel said in verse 5 about Edom cherishing perpetual hostility toward Israel. Notice that Ezekiel tells us that the evidence of this enmity was seen in how the Edomites handed the nation of Israel over to the power of the sword at the time of their final punishment. This appears to be the context for the prophecy of Obadiah.

Obadiah began his prophecy with the words "Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom" (verse 1). The whole prophecy is devoted to communicating the word of God to these enemies of Israel. Obadiah told Edom that a messenger had been sent among the nations to raise up an army against her (verse 1). God spoke particularly to the pride of Edom. We have already seen that a mountain rage ran through Edom's territory. This mountain range gave the Edomites a sense of security. Obadiah refers to the Edomites as living in the "clefts of the rock" (verse 3) and soaring aloft like the eagle (verse 4). They were secure in their "lofty dwelling" (verse 3) and boasted saying: "Who will bring me down to the ground?" (verse 3). They trusted in their geography to protect them from their enemies.

Obadiah prophesied, however, that even though their nest was "set among the stars" (verse 4), God would bring them down. They would be betrayed by those at peace with them (verse 9).

Obadiah made it clear to the Edomites why God was going to bring them down:

*[10] Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever.  
(Obadiah)*

God was angry with the Edomites because they had been violent toward His people. Obadiah explained this more fully in verses 11-15. Here he accused the Edomites of standing aloof when strangers carried off Israel's wealth, and foreigners entered his gates (verse 11). This took place when Judah was invaded by the Babylonians and her wealth stripped from her. Esau's descendants watched as her brothers and sisters were ravaged by Babylon but did nothing to help.

Obadiah went on to say that not only did Esau not help her brother in his time of need, but she was like one of her enemies and "cast lots for Jerusalem" (verse 11). In other words, she wanted to have something of the loot found in the city to enrich herself at the expense of her brother. Obadiah accused the Edomites of "gloating over the day of your brother in the day of his misfortune," and "rejoicing over the people of Judah in the day of their ruin." The destruction of Judah brought rejoicing to the heart of Edom. She delighted in his fall. Watching her brother fall to the Babylonians gave Edom a sense of superiority. Obadiah rebuked Edom for boasting in the day of Judah's distress (verse 12).

Obadiah accused Edom of "standing aloof" when her brother was being invaded and of rejoicing at his downfall. In verse 13 he takes this a step further by reminding the Edomites that they had entered the city to loot her brother's wealth. Beyond this, they also stood at the cross-roads to cut off those who were fleeing. They then handed these fugitives over to the enemy (verse 14). They sided with Judah's enemy.

Obadiah told the Edomites: "As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head" (verse 15). God would defend His people and punish the Edomites for their betrayal.

As for the nation of Judah, God would restore His blessing and restore them to Himself:

*[17] But in Mount Zion there shall be those who escape,  
and it shall be holy,  
and the house of Jacob shall possess their own possessions. (Obadiah)*

Obadiah prophesied that the day was coming when Jacob would be like a great fire and Esau like stubble. Jacob would consume the "house of Esau" until there was not a single survivor left (verse 18).

All we know of Obadiah and his message is contained in this short prophecy. He has a single message to deliver to the Edomites. He has a single issue to address in this message. He rebuked the nation of Edom for how they refused support to their brother, rejoiced and profited from his downfall. He told the Edomites that God had seen what they had done and would destroy them as a nation. His message is short and to the point. We have no record of any further prophecies of Obadiah.

While men like Daniel, Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke many times over many years, Obadiah is a relatively unknown prophet. God used him to address a single issue in the nation of Edom. Some prophets seem to rise out of nowhere to share a single message and disappear into obscurity when that message is delivered. God determines how He will use His prophets. He may give them a single message or many messages. The prophet needed to be willing to be used or not used as God saw fit.

### For Consideration:

Who were the Edomites and what caused the enmity between their descendants and the descendants of Judah and Israel?

Are their hurts from the past you have not been able to forget? How has this affected your relationship with those who hurt you?

What was the message of Obadiah to the Edomites?

Consider the prophet Obadiah. Obadiah seems to be a prophet with a single message who disappeared into obscurity. Are you willing to be unknown and forgotten? How tempting is it for us to draw attention to ourselves in ministry?

Have you ever wanted to do more than God had called you to do? Would you be content to be like Obadiah if this is what God called you to do?

### For Prayer:

Have you ever been hurt by someone and not able to forgive that person? Ask the Lord to help you to put aside all

bitterness. Ask Him to help you to forgive and love those who hurt you.

Ask the Lord to help you to be more concerned about being obedient than about making a name for yourself?

Ask the Lord to enable you to be faithful to Him and His purpose. Pray that no matter how big or small that purpose may be, you would walk faithfully and with a joyful heart in that purpose.



## Chapter 23 - Haggai

Little is known about the prophet Haggai. We know from the first chapter of his book that Haggai lived in the time of King Darius of Persia.

*[1] In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest: (Haggai 1)*

During the time that Israel and Judah were in exile, three dominant world powers arose. The Assyrians captured Israel and brought them into exile. These Assyrians were defeated by the Babylonians who invaded Judah in the south and took them into captivity as well. In time, the Medes and Persians conquered the Babylonians and became the dominant power of the day. It was Cyrus of Persia who decreed the release of all Israelites captives. Ezra 1:2-4 records this momentous decree:

*[2] "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. [3] Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel— he is the God who is in Jerusalem. [4] And let each survivor, in whatever place he*



*sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.” (Ezra 1)*

The Lord led Cyrus of Persia to declare this freedom to the Jews in his kingdom. Notice that Cyrus proclaimed that the Lord had charged him to build Him a house in Jerusalem. He, therefore, commissioned the Jews to return to Jerusalem to build a temple for the Lord their God. Under the capable leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, the people of God returned to Israel to rebuild the broken ruins.

Ezra 5:1 and 6:14 mention that Haggai was among those who returned from exile.

*[1] Now the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. (Ezra 5)*

*[14] And the elders of the Jews built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. They finished their building by decree of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia; [15] and this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. (Ezra 6)*

According to Ezra 6:14, King Darius confirmed the decree of Cyrus that the Jews were to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem. Notice also from this verse that the Jews “prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet.” His ministry was obviously vital and fruitful.

When Haggai was a prophet, the people of God who returned from exile were rebuilding the ruined city of Jerusalem. They had been commissioned by the king of Persian

to rebuild the temple of God. Notice, however, what was happening.

*[2] This is what the LORD Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.'" (Haggai 1)*

The people were saying that the time was not right for them to rebuild the temple. Instead of rebuilding the temple of the Lord, they focused on rebuilding and decorating their own homes:

*[3] Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: [4] "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" (Haggai 1)*

The people had time to panel their homes but no time to rebuild the ruined temple.

Haggai reminded them that they were suffering the judgment of God because of their indifference to the worship of His name. He challenged them to consider what was happening in their lives:

*[6] You have planted much but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it." (Haggai 1)*

It was evident that the blessing of God was no longer on the returned exiles. They worked hard but had little to show for their hard work. Haggai showed them that there was a connection between this lack of blessing and their refusal to rebuild the temple and restore the worship of God.

Haggai challenged the people to go up to the mountains and bring down timber to rebuild the house of the Lord.

This was the only way they could experience restored blessing and renewal.

*[9] "You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the LORD Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. [10] Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. [11] I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands." (Haggai 1)*

Haggai's message hit its mark, and the people listened to what he was saying. They began the construction of the temple.

As the new temple was being constructed, some of the older individuals who had seen the temple in Jerusalem prior to the exile began to complain saying that it was "nothing" (Haggai 2:3) compared to the former temple. Obviously, this would have been a discouragement to the younger ones. God gave Haggai a word for the people at that time:

*[4] But now be strong, O Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD. 'Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the LORD, 'and work. For I am with you,' declares the LORD Almighty. (Haggai 2)*

Haggai challenged the leaders to be strong. He reminded them that the Lord was with them. He encouraged them to persevere in the work of rebuilding despite the discouragement of their fellow Jews. Haggai told them that the Lord was with them in their effort. These words would have lifted the spirits of those discouraged by the words of the older generation.

Beyond this general encouragement to persevere, Haggai told these faithful workers that the Lord would bless their efforts in a very unexpected way:

*[6] "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. [7] I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty. [8] 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty. [9] 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty."* (Haggai 2)

Haggai told those working on the restoration of the temple that the glory of God would fall on it and it would be more glorious than the former temple. Again, this would have been a powerful motivation to continue the work.

In Haggai 2:15 the prophet challenged the people to watch what God was doing. He reminded them of what had taken place before they started the construction of the temple. At that time, the blessing of God had been removed. They would go to a heap of twenty measures and find only ten. They would go to draw fifty measures from a wine vat but discover there were only twenty left (Haggai 2:15-16). God struck their work with blight, mildew, and hail (Haggai 2:17). There were no seeds left in their barns (Haggai 2:19). Their fig, pomegranate and olive trees had not been bearing fruit (Haggai 2:19).

"Now then, consider from this day onward," Haggai challenged his people. Now that you have chosen to rebuild the temple, in obedience to the command of the Lord, watch and see what God will do. "From this day on," the Lord will bless you, he told them (Haggai 2:19). Their obedience to God and the restoring of worship in the land

would change everything. The blessing of God would be restored. Even the governor would experience this favour of God. Haggai prophesied that God would shake the heavens and the earth and overthrow thrones and foreign power for Governor Zerubbabel (Haggai 2:10-22). All this would come about because God's people returned to their God and walked in obedience to Him.

As a prophet, Haggai was an encourager. He challenged the people to get right with God. When they were discouraged by the older generation, he gave them the courage to persevere. He strengthened their resolve by telling them that God would bless their efforts and the glory of the temple they built would surpass that of the former temple. He urged them to open their eyes to what God was going to do because of their faithful obedience. Haggai's ministry was well received, and the work on the temple was completed.

There were prophets in the Bible whose desire to encourage the people was so strong that they would even lie to build them up. They would tell them that everything would be fine when judgement was about to fall. Haggai does not compromise the Word of God in his attempt to encourage. Every statement he made in this book was from the Lord. It was the Lord's desire to bless and encourage the people in their work. Haggai was merely an instrument of that encouragement. While prophets like Jeremiah were called to rebuke and announce judgement, Haggai's task was much more pleasant—he was to bring the encouragement of God.

For Consideration:

How did God use the Persian King Cyrus to convey His purpose for the nation of Israel? Can God still use the unbeliever to communicate His mission to the church of our day?

What problem did Haggai need to address in the land of Israel?

What was the result of neglecting the temple? What does this show us about the priorities of God's people in those days? What are your priorities?

How did Hosea encourage the people in the work God had called them to do? How important do you think that encouragement was for the people of God at that time?

What did Haggai say would be the result of obedience to God?

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to show you if your priorities in life are right? What stands between you and God today? Ask God to help you to overcome any obstacle to blessing and intimacy with Him.

Are there people who need encouragement in your midst?  
Ask the Lord to show you how you can be a blessing to  
them in their time of need.

Take a moment to thank the Lord for the encouragement  
He brings you in your time of need.

Ask God to give you the perseverance you need to be obedient  
to the calling He has placed on your life.

## Chapter 24 - Zechariah

The name Zechariah was a popular name in Old Testament times. It means “the Lord remembers.” Our interest here is the writer of the book of Zechariah who lived during the reign of Darius the Mede. In Zechariah 1:1 we understand that he was the son of Berechiah and grandson to Iddo. According to Ezra 5:1 and 6:14, Zechariah lived at the time of Haggai and worked with him prophesying to the people who had returned from exile to rebuild the temple and city of Jerusalem.

Zechariah begins his prophecy with a reminder that the Lord had been angry with their fathers. Because of this, He sent them into exile. Zechariah challenges the people of his day not to repeat the same mistake:

*[4] Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.’ But they did not hear or pay attention to me, declares the LORD. (Zechariah 1)*

The people who returned from exile now had an opportunity to learn from the sin of their fathers. Zechariah encouraged them to start fresh and to walk in obedience to God.

Unlike his co-worker Haggai, who spoke plainly to the people, Zechariah’s prophecies are filled with symbolism. The Lord spoke to him in visions, dreams, and pictures. The



prophet records the first of these pictures in Zechariah 1:7-17. Here he saw a man riding a red horse standing among some myrtle trees. Behind him were other horses of differing colours. This appears to be all he saw. The picture intrigued him, however, and he asked the Lord what it meant. The Lord told him that the man on the red horse was the angel of the Lord. He and the other horsemen had “patrolled the earth,” and found everything to be at rest (1:11). The angel who explained this picture to Zechariah told him that the Lord was “exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem” and that He would pour out His blessing once more so that it would “overflow with prosperity” (1:17). As you can imagine, these words would have been a tremendous comfort and assurance to the exiles during the rebuilding the city and temple in Jerusalem. The Lord God was promising to prosper the work of their hands.

Zechariah saw a second picture in chapter 1. This again was a very simple picture. He saw four horns. It is interesting to see the simplicity of these pictures. Despite their simplicity, however, there was profound significance attached to these pictures. When Zechariah asked what the meaning of these horns was, he was told that they represented the nations that had scattered and oppressed Judah. The angel speaking to Zechariah explained that God was going to destroy these horns because of what they had done to His people (1:18-21). The Lord God who promised to prosper His people would now punish the nations that had pursued them.

In chapter 2 Zechariah saw a picture of a man with a measuring line in his hand. He was able to interact with the man in this vision and asked him what he was doing. The man told him that he was measuring the city of Jerusalem. As Zechariah spoke, an angel approached to say:

*[4] ... ‘Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of people and livestock in*

*it. [5] And I will be to her a wall of fire all around, declares the LORD, and I will be the glory in her midst.” (Zechariah 2)*

As Zechariah listened to the angel, a call went out to the exiles in Babylon:

*[7] Up! Escape to Zion, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon. [8] For thus said the LORD of hosts, after his glory sent me to the nations who plundered you, for he who touches you touches the apple of his eye: [9] “Behold, I will shake my hand over them, and they shall become plunder for those who served them. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me. (Zechariah 2)*

It was time for the people of God to return to their homeland. God had not forgotten them. They were the “apple of His eye,” and He would restore them to their blessings and punish those who had plundered them.

Zechariah’s vision in chapter 3 concerned the high priest. In this vision, Zechariah saw the high priest dressed in filthy clothes standing before the angel of the Lord. Beside him was Satan accusing him. The Lord rebuked Satan and told him that this priest was His chosen instrument.

In the vision, the Lord then called for his angels to remove the priest’s filthy clothes and dress him with clean priestly garments. The Lord told Joshua the priest that all his sins were forgiven. After dressing him in clean clothes, the angel told Joshua:

*[7] “Thus says the LORD of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here. (Zechariah 3)*

The angel charged Joshua the high priest to walk in obedience and faithfulness. If he did, God would give him

authority and blessing in his ministry. The angel went on to tell Zechariah that the day was coming with the Lord would bring a servant called the Branch who would remove the iniquity of the land in a single day (3:9). That Branch was none other than the Lord Jesus, who by his death, would bring pardon for sin. There was a bright future for the nation.

In the fourth chapter, the prophet saw a picture of a golden lampstand. It is interesting to note in Zechariah 4:1 that Zechariah prefaces the description of what he saw by telling us that an angel came and woke him. The implication seems to be that he saw the lampstand when he was awake. While God spoke in dreams, he also spoke in pictures and vision when his prophet was awake.

The lampstand Zechariah saw in his vision seemed to be fed from a bowl that was being supplied by two olive trees (one on the right and the other on the left). When Zechariah asked the Lord what this picture meant, he was told:

*[6] Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts. [7] Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'" (Zechariah 4)*

While there is much that could be said about this vision, the Lord was making a point to the governor. God told Zerubbabel that it was not by his might that he would accomplish that task of rebuilding the city and temple. It would be by the power of His Spirit that this work would be accomplished. The picture of the lampstand being supplied with an abundance of oil represented the willingness of the Spirit of God to empower the governor with all the wisdom, skill and strength necessary to complete the task

he had been called to do. Through Zechariah, the Lord told Zerubbabel:

*[9] "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. (Zechariah 4)*

Zechariah's vision in chapter five was that of a large flying scroll. The angel told Zechariah that this scroll represented a curse on anyone who would steal or swear falsely (5:3). Through this picture, the Lord reminded His people that while His blessing would be on them, they would need to walk faithfully in His purpose to assure that it remained.

This reminder of sin and its curse is pictured again in chapter five in the vision Zechariah had of a basket with a lead cover. Inside the basket was a woman who was described as "wickedness" (5:8). She was thrust into that basket, and the heavy cover placed over it so that she would not escape. In his vision, the basket was being taken away from Judah to the land of Shinar (where the tower of Babel had been built). There she would remain, separated from the people of God. There are two points we need to make here. First, that God was willing to take away the sin of the nation and restore them to a good relationship with Himself. Just as the wicked woman was thrust into a basket and taken away from the land, so God would remove their sins. The second point to this vision, however, was a warning to the people of God. They could lose all that they had if they chose to wander from God. They could be the ones to be thrust into that basket and taken away from their land. They had just experienced this in their exile. The vision of the basket was a warning to the returned exiles, not to repeat the error of their ancestors.

In chapter 6 we read about Zechariah's vision of four chariots. These chariots appeared out of two bronze

mountains. The chariots were drawn by a red, black, white and spotted horse (6:2-3). When Zechariah asked about these horses, he was told that they represented the four winds of heaven that had been sent out to patrol the earth. Mention is made in verse 8 of the horse that went to the north (from where Israel's enemies had come). This horse had set God's Spirit at rest. This rest may have come in the defeat of Israel's enemies and the fact that justice had been done in their defeat and the return of His people to their homeland.

We have already seen that Zechariah prophesied that the day was coming when a man called, The Branch would bring forgiveness in a single day. In Zechariah 6:10, Zechariah it told to take three of the exiles who had returned from Babylon to the house of Josiah. He was to get silver and gold from these men and make a crown. He was then to take this crown and set it on the head of Joshua, the high priest. When he had done this, he was to declare:

*[12] ... 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD. [13] It is he who shall build the temple of the LORD and shall bear royal honor and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both."*

This crowning of Joshua, the high priest was highly symbolic. The name Jesus is the Aramaic form of Joshua. This was the language that was spoken when Jesus was living on this earth. This should not go unnoticed. Joshua, the high priest, bore the same name and the Branch who was to come. That name literally meant "Jehovah is salvation." The second detail we need to notice here is that a crown was given to the priest. This was not normal. The priest did not exercise the role of king. In this case, however, the crowning of Joshua was a symbol of the Lord Jesus who

would come to exercise both the function of priest and king. Third, it was at this time that the people of God under the direction of Joshua the high priest were rebuilding the temple. This was also symbolic of what the Branch (the Lord Jesus) would do. He too would build a temple. His temple, however, was not made with human hands. His temple would be composed of men and women who were joined together to worship the Lord God. In fact, Zechariah 6:15 tells us that people would come from afar to help build this temple. In other words, foreigners would be part of this great work God would accomplish. God's kingdom would expand from the people of Judah and Israel to the ends of the earth under the reign of this righteous Branch. This symbolic crowning of Joshua, the high priest looked forward to the day when a true priest/king would come to rule over His people. The Lord told Zechariah that the crown that was made for Joshua was to be placed in the temple as a reminder of the king who was to come.

*[14] And the crown shall be in the temple of the LORD as a reminder to Helem, Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Hen the son of Zephaniah. (Zechariah 6)*

In the fourth year of King Darius, people came from Bethel to see Zechariah. They had a question for him about the celebration of the fifth month. It was on this month that the temple of Jerusalem had been destroyed about seventy years prior. They had regularly remembered this month with mourning and fasting. Now that the new temple was being built, they wondered if the Lord wanted them to continue grieving for the old one.

Zechariah sought the Lord about this matter, and the Lord answered:

*[5] "Say to all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for me that*

*you fasted? [6] And when you eat and when you drink, do you not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves? (Zechariah 7)*

The Lord told these individuals who had come to consult Zechariah that this grieving and fasting they were doing was not for Him. They grieved because of what they had lost. They mourned because of their judgement, but they did not grieve because they had sinned against God. They were a religious people, but they had no relationship with God. Zechariah told those present that day that this was why the Lord had scattered their ancestors and sent them into exile. He reminded them that God was looking for more than religious celebrations and rituals. He was looking for a people who delighted in Him with all their heart.

Zechariah went on in chapter 8 to remind his people of the jealous love of the Lord for them as His people.

*[8:1] And the word of the LORD of hosts came, saying, [2] "Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath. (Zechariah 8)*

In saying this, the Lord was reminding His people that He wanted a relationship with them and not just religious celebrations and traditions. In fact, Zechariah went on to declare that the Lord had returned to Jerusalem and was in their midst (8:3). With the return of the Lord came wonderful blessings for His people. Listen to the words of Zechariah to the returned exiles in Zechariah 8:4-8:

*[4] Thus says the LORD of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age. [5] And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. [6] Thus says the LORD of hosts: If it is marvelous in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be marvelous in my sight, declares*

*the LORD of hosts? [7] Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, [8] 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.” (Zechariah 8)*

With the presence of the Lord in their midst, the city of Jerusalem would be a place of security and rich blessing. God had reached out to His people and declared that they were His. He promised to be faithful to them as their God. Under His care, they would experience peace and fruitfulness:

*[12] For there shall be a sowing of peace. The vine shall give its fruit, and the ground shall give its produce, and the heavens shall give their dew. And I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. (Zechariah 8)*

God would be faithful to His people. In return, however, He required that they walk faithfully with Him by loving and respecting their brothers and sisters:

*[16] These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another; render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace; [17] do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, declares the LORD.” (Zechariah 8)*

As the people of God walked in faithfulness and love for their God, His blessing would fall to such an extent that people from far away nations would hear and come seeking this blessing for themselves:

*[20] “Thus says the LORD of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities. [21] The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, ‘Let us*



*go at once to entreat the favor of the LORD and to seek the LORD of hosts; I myself am going.' [22] Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD. [23] Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'” (Zechariah 8)*

Zechariah reminded his people that the Lord their God would punish the nations that had oppressed them. In chapter 9 he spoke to a variety of cities and countries, revealing that their judgement was coming. He told Damascus that the Lord had His eye on all the tribes of Israel (9:1) Tyre would be stripped of her possessions and devoured by fire (9:4). The Philistine cities of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod would writhe in anguish when the judgement of God fell on them. They would be cut off (9:5-6).

As for Jerusalem, however, Zechariah prophesied that a King would come to them (9:9). Notice how Zechariah described this king:

*[9] Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
Behold, your king is coming to you;  
righteous and having salvation is he,  
humble and mounted on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9)*

This king was a righteous king who would bring salvation to His people. He would also be a humble king who would come to them mounted on a colt, the foal of a donkey. A quick reading of Luke 19:30-38 reveals the identity of this King. The king spoken of here is the Lord Jesus who rode into Jerusalem on a colt. He was the righteous King who would bring salvation to His people.

Zechariah went on in chapter 9 to describe this righteous King. He would bring an end to battle and speak peace to the nations (9:10). His rule would not be in Jerusalem alone but over the entire earth (9:10). He would set prisoners free by the blood of His covenant (9:11). Zechariah describes those who belonged to this King as being like the jewels of His crown (9:16). They were precious and beautiful. We can only imagine the encouragement that this would have brought to the people of God who had just recently returned from exile.

As “jewels” in the crown of their Lord, Zechariah challenged his people to seek the favour of their God who loved them:

*[1] Ask rain from the LORD  
in the season of the spring rain,  
from the LORD who makes the storm clouds,  
and he will give them showers of rain,  
to everyone the vegetation in the field. (Zechariah 10)*

It grieved the heart of God that His people were not being cared for by their own earthly shepherds.

*[3] “My anger is hot against the shepherds,  
and I will punish the leaders;  
for the LORD of hosts cares for his flock,  
the house of Judah,  
and will make them like his majestic steed in battle.  
(Zechariah 10)*

Zechariah prophesied that God would strengthen those who had been neglected and weakened because of a lack of pastoral care from their earthly shepherds. God would have compassion on them (10:6). God restore His people, and their hearts would again rejoice in the Lord (10:7). Through Zechariah the Lord promised His people:

*[12] I will make them strong in the LORD,  
and they shall walk in his name,”  
declares the LORD. (Zechariah 10)*

Fellowship would be restored and God's people would again become strong as they walked in His name.

After encouraging his people to walk with the Lord and in the fullness of His blessing, the prophet Zechariah seems to look forward in time to the days of the righteous King who would come. Zechariah 11 describes a time when God's people would turn from their Shepherd/King.

*[7] So I became the shepherd of the flock doomed to be slaughtered by the sheep traders. And I took two staffs, one I named Favor, the other I named Union. And I tended the sheep. [8] In one month I destroyed the three shepherds. But I became impatient with them, and they also detested me. [9] So I said, “I will not be your shepherd. What is to die, let it die. What is to be destroyed, let it be destroyed. And let those who are left devour the flesh of one another.” [10] And I took my staff Favor, and I broke it, annulling the covenant that I had made with all the peoples. [11] So it was annulled on that day, and the sheep traders, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of the LORD. (Zechariah 11)*

Notice from these verses how the shepherd cared for his sheep, but because they detested him, he grew impatient and annulled his covenant with them.

For his efforts as their shepherd, the sheep weighed out thirty pieces of silver. This money was refused, however, and thrown into the house of the Lord for the potter.

*[12] Then I said to them, “If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.” And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. [13] Then the LORD said to me, “Throw it to the potter”— the lordly price at*

*which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD, to the potter. (Zechariah 11)*

These details cannot go unnoticed. Matthew 26:15 tells us how Judas betrayed the Lord for the price of thirty pieces of silver. He would eventually realize the seriousness of what he did and return the money to those who had given it to him. Listen to the account of what happened that day:

*[3] Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, [4] saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." [5] And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. [6] But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money." [7] So they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers. (Matthew 27)*

Judas threw down the money in the temple fulfilling the words of Zechariah, "so I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord." Notice also that Zechariah tells us that the money that would be thrown into the house of the Lord would not remain there. It would go to the potter. Matthew 27:7 tells us that the money Judas threw into the temple would go toward the purchase of a field from a potter. Zechariah prophesied that the day would come when the Great Shepherd/King who would come to God's people would be rejected and betrayed by those He came to save. This is clearly a picture of what would happen when the Lord Jesus lived among His people

Despite their rejection of the Lord Jesus as their Messiah, Zechariah declared that their God would not forsake them.

He told Israel that the Lord their God would give them wonderful victories over their enemies:

*[8] On that day the LORD will protect the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the LORD, going before them. [9] And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. (Zechariah 12)*

These were words of tremendous compassion and grace to a people who would reject His Son, the Lord Jesus. Notice, however, that even this matter would be addressed. Zechariah prophesied that the day was coming when the Spirit of God would work in the lives of the Jewish people and they would grieve over the one they had pierced:

*[10] "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. (Zechariah 12)*

Zechariah prophesied about how the Lord Jesus would be pierced by a Roman sword on the cross. He also declared that the day was coming when the Jews would come to understand what their ancestors had done in crucifying the Messiah. He went on to say that the Lord their God would one day open a great fountain to cleanse them from their sin:

*[13:1] "On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness. (Zechariah 13)*

A great renewal would take place, and God's people would return to Him. Idols would be removed from the land, as

well as all the false prophets who spoke lies and deceived the people (Zechariah 13:2).

Zechariah concludes his prophecy with a statement about the future of God's people. He tells them that there were difficult times coming for them. In fact, he describes in chapter 14 a time when foreign nations would rise up against the people of the Lord to plunder, rape and kill

*[1] Behold, a day is coming for the LORD, when the spoil taken from you will be divided in your midst. [2] For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women raped. Half of the city shall go out into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. (Zechariah 14)*

It is interesting to compare what Zechariah says here to what the vision of the apostle John in the book of Revelation. Zechariah speaks here about the gathering of all nations against Jerusalem. John records a similar event in Revelation 16 when he said:

*[12] The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. [13] And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. [14] For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. [15] ("Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!") [16] And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. (Revelation 16)*

According to John, the demons of hell would invite all the nations of the earth to do battle against the Lord and His people. Zechariah clearly spoke of nations gathering against Jerusalem to do battle.

Zechariah went on to prophesy that that Lord would take a stand against these enemies. When he made his stand the mount of Olives would be split and God's people given a way of escape

*[3] Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. [4] On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward. [5] And you shall flee to the valley of my mountains, for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azal. And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. (Zechariah 14)*

In John's vision in Revelation he said:

*[17] The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" [18] And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. [19] The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. (Revelation 16)*

Like Zechariah, John speaks of a day when the Lord would take His stand. On that day there would be great earthquakes and a splitting apart of the city.

What would be the result of this great judgement of the Lord? First, Zechariah tells us that the Lord would conquer His enemies. They would be defeated and suffer greatly for their actions:

*[12] And this shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. (Zechariah 14)*

Second, the prophet describes a time in which the light of the sun, cold and frost would cease. There would be no more darkness. Even in the evening, there would be light (Zechariah 14:6-7). The apostle John speaks of a very similar time in Revelation 21:

*[23] And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. [24] By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it (Revelation 21)*

Third, Zechariah saw in his vision what he describes as living waters from Jerusalem to bless the earth.

*[8] On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea. It shall continue in summer as in winter. (Zechariah 14)*

John describes this in Revelation 22 in the following way:

*[22:1] Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb [2] through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22)*



Fourth, Zechariah tells us that after that day of judgement, the Lord would be king over the entire earth.

*[9] And the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one. (Zechariah 14)*

Finally, Zechariah tells us that all the nations would worship the King and the earth would be filled with holiness.

*[16] Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Booths... [20] And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "Holy to the LORD." And the pots in the house of the LORD shall be as the bowls before the altar. [21] And every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holy to the LORD of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them and boil the meat of the in them. And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day. (Zechariah 14)*

The apostle John puts it this way:

*[25] and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. [26] They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. [27] But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 22)*

Like Zechariah, John tells us that the glory of the nations would enter the city to bring honour to the Lord God. Nothing false or detestable would ever enter this great city of God.

Zechariah prophesied that while there were difficult days coming for the exiles who returned, the Messiah would come and set them free. He would work powerfully in the

midst of His people and renew their hearts. Ultimately, He would arise and bring final victory over their enemies and usher them into a kingdom of righteousness and peace that would never end.

Like Haggai, his co-worker, Zechariah brought great encouragement to the people of God who returned from exile. While Haggai encouraged the people practically to complete the work of rebuilding the temple, Zechariah encouraged them spiritually. He spoke of the intense jealousy of the Lord for them. He told the Jews that it was the intention of the Lord their God to prosper them in the land He had given them. To do this, He would empower them by his Spirit and take away their sin. He would send a Great Shepherd to bring forgiveness and renewal. While things would not be comfortable in the coming years for them, The Lord would arise and bring final judgement against their enemies and reign supreme over all the earth in a kingdom that had no end.

For Consideration:

At the beginning of his prophecy, the Lord showed Zechariah a series of simple pictures which had spiritual significance. Give an example of one of these pictures and its meaning.

What does Zechariah teach his people about the kind of relationship God wanted to have with them and the purpose He had for them as His people?

What does Zechariah tell us about the Lord Jesus in his prophecy?

What was the heart of God for the world according to Zechariah?

How would the words of Zechariah be an encouragement to the people who returned from exile? What encouragement do you receive from Zechariah's prophecy?

For Prayer:

Has the Lord ever used a simple picture to teach you a great spiritual lesson? Ask Him to help you to be sensitive to the ways He wants to challenge and speak to you.

Take a moment to thank the Lord for His grace and compassion. Even though we have often fallen short of His standard, He continues to accept us.

Thank the Lord for what Zechariah teaches about the Lord Jesus who was to come. Thank the Lord Jesus that He came as the Branch, the Great King, and Shepherd to reach out to us in our need.

It seems that John the apostle saw many of the same details as Zechariah although they were separated by many years. Thank the Lord that His truth never changes and is confirmed in many ways through His servants.

Thank the Lord that He has opened the door for all nations to worship Him and know His favour and grace.



## Chapter 25 - Joel

All we know about the prophet Joel is recorded for us in his book, that is to say, he was the son of Pethuel. Apart from the name of his father, there is no other information about him in Scripture. There is no date recorded in the prophecy, so it is difficult to discern the time in which he lived. A quick reading of the book, however, may give us some clues. Let's take a moment to examine these clues.

In Joel 3 we read:

*[3:1] "For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, [2] I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land, [3] and have cast lots for my people, and have traded a boy for a prostitute, and have sold a girl for wine and have drunk it. (Joel 3)*

There are three details we need to see in these verses. First, in verse 1 we read that the days were coming when God would restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem. The implication here is that these fortunes had already been lost. Second, in verse 2 we see that the nations had scattered God's people and would be judged by God for this. The assumption is that this scattering had already taken place. Third, notice the reference to the casting of

lots for the people of God. Compare this to Nahum 3:10 and Obadiah 11 which speak about the time that God's people were taken off into exile:

*[10] Yet she became an exile; she went into captivity;  
her infants were dashed in pieces at the head of every  
street;*

*for her honored men, lots were cast,  
and all her great men were bound in chains. (Nahum 3)*

*[11] On the day that you stood aloof,  
on the day that strangers carried off his wealth  
and foreigners entered his gates  
and cast lots for Jerusalem,  
you were like one of them. (Obadiah)*

In both passages, the nations were condemned because they cast lots for the people of God who were going off to exile. These details would lead us to believe that Joel wrote his prophecy after these events had taken place. God's people had already lost their fortunes and had been scattered to the nations.

The other detail of significance in the prophecy of Joel is the reference to the temple and the city of Jerusalem. Consider what the prophet said in Joel 1:

*[14] Consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly.  
Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land  
to the house of the LORD your God and cry out to the  
LORD. (Joel 1)*

Through the prophet Joel, the Lord calls His people to a solemn assembly at the house of the Lord. Notice a similar reference in Joel 2:

*[17] Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests,  
the ministers of the LORD, weep  
and say, "Spare your people, O LORD, and make not  
your heritage a reproach,*

*a byword among the nations. Why should they say  
among the peoples,  
'Where is their God?'" (Joel 2)*

This call for the people to come to the temple and for the priests to weep between the vestibule and the altar leads us to understand that the temple the Babylonians had destroyed by the Babylonians, who had scattered God's people and cast lots for them, had now been rebuilt. If we understand these clues correctly, this would place Joel after the Jews had returned from exile.

The prophet Joel begins his message with a call to the elders of the nation to look back in history to see if they could recall a time like what the people of God had been experiencing in his days.

*[2] Hear this, you elders; give ear, all inhabitants of the  
land!*

*Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of  
your fathers?*

*[3] Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their  
children,  
and their children to another generation. (Joel 1)*

Joel goes on to describe what had been happening. He describes a vast swarm of locusts that had been devastating the land. Notice that he describes four types of locusts—the cutting locust, the swarming locust, the hopping locust, and the destroying locust.

*[4] What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has  
eaten.*

*What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has  
eaten,*

*and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust  
has eaten. (Joel 1)*



Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown have the following to say about these four locusts:

*The Hebrews make the first species refer to Assyria and Babylon; the second species, to Medo-Persia; the third, to Greco-Macedonia and Antiochus Epiphanes; the fourth, to the Romans. Though the primary reference be to literal locusts, the Holy Spirit doubtless had in view the successive empires which assailed Judea, each worse than its predecessor, Rome being the climax. (Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, and David Brown: Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, Notes on Joel 1:4, Laridian, 1871)*

If Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown are correct in their interpretation, Joel may be referring to the struggles the people of God were experiencing as their nation was being devastated by these successive empires. This interpretation seems to be supported by verses 6 and 7 which say:

*[6] For a nation has come up against my land, powerful and beyond number;  
its teeth are lions' teeth, and it has the fangs of a lioness.  
[7] It has laid waste my vine and splintered my fig tree;  
it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down; their branches are made white. (Joel 1)*

The locusts appear to be described here as a series of nations that have been laying waste the land of Israel and Judah. Joel speaks at a time when the people of God were trying to process the devastation they had been experiencing at the hand of these nations.

God's people were called to grieve like a young bride who had lost her bridegroom (1:8). The land had been devastated. The grain fields had been destroyed (1:10-11). The supplies of wine, oil, and fruit had dried up (verse 10-12). In light of this devastation, Joel calls the people to declare a fast and assemble the people to cry out to the Lord for

mercy and blessing (1:14). The Lord alone could restore what had been stripped from them. Joel challenges the people to return to their God as the source of their blessing.

According to Joel, there was a day of great judgment coming. That day of judgement would be announced by the sound of a trumpet (2:1). It would be a terrible day of clouds and thick darkness (2:2). Joel describes this judgement as coming from an enemy, the likes of which had never been seen, nor would there ever be anything like them in the generations to come (2:2). He described the appearance of this enemy as follows:

*[4] Their appearance is like the appearance of horses,  
and like war horses, they run.*

*[5] As with the rumbling of chariots, they leap on the tops  
of the mountains,  
like the crackling of a flame of fire devouring the stubble,  
like a powerful army drawn up for battle. (Joel 2)*

A comparison of what Joel describes with Revelation 9 reveals some important similarities. In Revelation 9 the apostle John speaks of an angel who announced the judgement of God by blowing a trumpet. When that trumpet was blown, thick cloud and darkness rose from a bottomless pit (Revelation 9:2). Out of that pit came terrifying locusts whose appearance John described as follows:

*[7] In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared  
for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of  
gold; their faces were like human faces (Revelation 9)*

These locusts ravaged the earth like a mighty army (Revelation 9:8-10). These similarities cannot go unnoticed. It is possible that John and Joel saw the same vision describing a terrible judgment yet to come.

Joel went on to say that this day of judgment would be a day when the sun and the moon would be darkened, and the stars would withdraw their shining.

*[10] The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. (Joel 2)*

Notice what the apostle John saw in his vision in Revelation 8 after the fourth angel blew his trumpet:

*[12] The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night. (Revelation 8)*

Both John and Joel seem to predict a similar day of judgement to come.

Considering this coming day of judgement, the prophet Joel called his people to return to the Lord with all their heart (2:12). He pleaded with them to "rend your hearts and not your garments" (2:13). The Lord was looking for a broken and sincere heart. Joel reassured the people that God was a gracious and merciful God (2:13) and might relent of the judgement He had planned and leave them with a blessing instead (2:14). Joel called the priests to take their stand and plead with God to spare His people from the terrible wrath to come (2:17). Joel prophesied that great blessing awaited those who would return to the Lord (2:18-27). In fact, according to Joel, the Lord would pour out his Spirit not just on the Jewish nation but on all flesh (2:28).

Joel declared that the day would come when their sons and daughters would prophesy. Their old men would dream dreams and their young men would see visions. Even the lowest male and female servants among them

would experience this outpouring of God's Spirit (2:28-29). The Spirit of God would not distinguish between class or nationality. The day was coming when all flesh from the lowest class to the highest rank would experience this presence of God's Spirit.

In the book of Acts, we read of how the Holy Spirit fell on those who were praying in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. This outpouring of the Spirit caused quite a stir among the people who witnessed it. Some even accused the believers upon whom the Spirit fell of being drunk. On that day, however, Peter stood up and addressed the crowd with these words:

*[14] But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. [15] For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. [16] But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:*

*[17] "And in the last days it shall be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams;*

*[18] even on my male servants and female servants  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall  
prophesy. (Acts 2)*

It is quite clear from what Peter told those present that day, that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was in fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel.

Joel would go on to say that in the last days, God would show wonders in the heavens and earth:

*[30] "And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. [31] The sun*

*shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.  
(Joel 2)*

Preaching in the temple in Jerusalem one day the Lord Jesus told those present that there would be difficult days coming. He made it clear that in the days before His return there would be great signs in the heavens:

*[29] "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (Matthew 24)*

*[25] "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, [26] people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. [27] And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. (Luke 21)*

It appears that Joel speaks of the same events. His prophecy has yet to see its complete fulfilment.

In Joel 3, the prophet speaks of a day when God would restore the fortunes of His people and judge those who had oppressed them (3:1-2). On that day the Lord God would judge the nations (3:12). While the nations would be judged for their sin and evil, those who belonged to the Lord would be spared. Joel prophesied that the Lord would reign from Jerusalem (3:17). The city would be holy, and no stranger to God would ever pass through it again (3:17). A great stream of water would flow from the house of the Lord to water the valleys (3:18) and the city would be inhabited forever under the blessing of God (3:20).

Listen to the description of the apostle John of the heavenly Jerusalem in the book of Revelation:

*[24] By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, [25] and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. [26] They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. [27] But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 21)*

*[1] Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb [2] through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. [3] No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. [4] They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. [5] And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22)*

The apostle John speaks here about the heavenly city of Jerusalem as a city where the glory of the Lord reigned. It was a holy city where no stranger to God would ever enter (Revelation 21:26). From that city, a great stream of water flowed bringing healing and blessing to the nations (Revelation 22:2-3). Again, the similarities between the prophecy of Joel and John cannot go unnoticed. Joel appears to be speaking about the fulfilment of God's purposes in the last days.

Joel began his prophecy by challenging his people to look at how the Lord had judged them by sending them into exile. He told them, however, that there was another even greater day of judgement coming. This judgement would be worse than the exile they had experienced. Joel

encouraged his people to learn from their past and return to the Lord before this great and final day.

In the days preceding this final judgement, the Lord would pour out His Holy Spirit bringing many to Himself. There would then be great signs in the sky and on the earth announcing the approach of this final judgement. Those who refused to repent would suffer the wrath of God. Those who belonged to Him would dwell under His reign in a place where sin would be forever banished.

Joel speaks to a people who had returned from exile. He challenged them to learn the lessons God taught them through their discipline. There would be days of great victory ahead for them if they would submit to their God and walk with Him but a great and final judgement for those who turned from Him.

For Consideration:

What internal evidence do we have in the book of Joel that indicates the time in which he prophesied?

Joel challenged his people to learn from their past. How much have you learned from your past? How has the Lord taught you through the things you have suffered?

How do the teaching of Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament help us to understand and interpret the prophecy of Joel?

Joel prophesied that the day was coming when the Lord God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh. Peter tells us that that event took place on the day of Pentecost. How has the ministry of the Holy Spirit changed your life?

Joel pointed people to a day of final judgement for the unbeliever and eternal blessing for those who belonged to God. How do you know that you belong to God and will be part of those who reign with Him in the New Jerusalem?

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to help you to learn from His discipline in your life.

Thank the Lord that we are living in days when the Holy Spirit has been poured out into our hearts. Thank the Lord that He has given us such a precious gift to enable us to live for Him. Ask God to allow you to be more sensitive to the leading and empowering of His Spirit.

Take a moment to thank the Lord that justice will prevail and that He will judge sin and bring an end to it in His time.

Thank the Lord for the promise of eternity under His reign in a city where sin no longer dwells.





## Chapter 26 - Malachi

Malachi is the final Old Testament prophet we will consider in this study. His name means “my messenger.” He gives us no clue in his book as to his identity or family. While the date of the prophecy is not provided, there is evidence in the book of the time in which Malachi lived.

The first clue to the date of the prophecy of Malachi is seen in the references to the temple of God and the sacrifices that were being made. In fact, the Lord spoke directly to the priests through Malachi and accused them of offering polluted food on the altar (1:7). Malachi accused Judah of profaning the sanctuary of the Lord (2:11). The Lord challenged His people to bring their full tithe to the storehouse of the Lord (3:10). These details are important because they place Malachi at a time when the temple was in place, and the worship of God was taking place. This means that he either prophesied before the exile and destruction of the temple or after the temple had been rebuilt when the people of God had returned from their captivity.

The second important clue as to the date of the book comes in Malachi 1:8:

*[8] When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi*

God accused His people in this verse of bringing defiled offerings to Him. Notice how He told them to present these same offerings to their governor to see if he would accept them. This shows us that the nation was at this time being ruled by a governor and not a king. Malachi prophesied at a time when God's people were under a governor and his people worshipped in the temple.

The last king of Judah was Zedekiah. 2 Kings 25 tells us that he rebelled against the Babylonians. King Nebuchadnezzar sent his forces to Jerusalem to quiet this rebellion. These forces took the city of Jerusalem and captured King Zedekiah. At that time, the Babylonians destroyed the temple of God and took its sacred articles back with them to Babylon. In the place of a king, Nebuchadnezzar chose a governor to administer the city. Gedaliah, the first governor, however, ruled over a city with no temple. It would not be until after the return of God's people from exile that they would have both a temple and a governor. We deduce from this, then that Malachi prophesied after the arrival of God's people from exile and after the rebuilding of the new temple under Ezra and Nehemiah. He would be the last of the Old Testament prophets.

Malachi likely prophesied after Haggai and Zechariah who encouraged the people to rebuild the temple and restore the worship of God in the nation. The ministry of Haggai and Zechariah was significant, but it did not take long for the people of God to become lax in their faith and relationship with God.

Malachi begins his prophecy with a reminder to God's people of the love and devotion of God toward them— "I have loved you," says the LORD (Malachi 1:2). Notice, however, the response of God's people to this statement in Malachi 1:2:

[2] *"I have loved you," says the LORD. But you say, "How have you loved us?" "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob (Malachi 1)*

The words, "how have you loved us?" are striking. They reveal something about the people of God. They had become blinded to the love and devotion of God toward them. I have often found myself challenging the people of God to open their eyes to the presence and care of God in their lives. There are many times that God demonstrates His love, but we do not notice. We live our lives as if these things happened by chance but do not see the protection or devotion of God toward us in these events. God's people were no longer seeing God. They were no longer aware of His provision and tenderness toward them.

Malachi makes another revealing statement in chapter 1:

[6] *"A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, 'How have we despised your name?' (Malachi 1)*

This statement is directed to the priests of the day. Malachi told them that they despised the name of the Lord. The word "despise" is a strong word. It shows that the priests showed no respect for the Lord. What is even more surprising here is that response of the priests to this accusation: "How have we despised your name?"

The priests were guilty of despising the name of the Lord, but they had no idea as to how they were doing this. As spiritual leaders of God's people, they were to teach them how to honour the Lord their God. The problem, however, was that these religious leaders were so blind to the truth of God and the teaching of his Scripture that they didn't even know how to honour Him themselves.

Malachi had to explain to these priests that by offering blind, lame and sick animals as sacrifices to the Lord they were not respecting Him. In fact, God took such offense at their offerings that he said:

*[10] Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. [11] For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.*  
(Malachi 1)

God wished that someone would have the courage to shut the doors of the temple so that His people would no longer blaspheme His name by their polluted sacrifices. The children of God did not respect Him enough to offer Him their best. Instead, they offered him what they themselves no longer wanted.

Malachi went on in chapter 1 to address the attitude of the priests of that day toward their responsibilities:

*[13] But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, says the LORD of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD. (Malachi 1)*

Those who had been chosen by God detested their responsibilities. "What a weariness this is," they said. They had lost all sense of awe and respect for God. Their priestly duties were a monotonous repetition. They went through the motions but had no awareness of God in their duties. Their heart was no longer in what they were doing.

God has a word to speak to these priests. The seriousness of this word is such that God told the priests that if they did not take it to heart, they would be cursed:

*[2:1] "And now, O priests, this command is for you. [2] If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honor to my name, says the LORD of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart. (Malachi 2)*

Through Malachi, the Lord reminded the priests of their obligation to Him. He had entered a covenant with the Levites and promised them life and peace. In return, He expected that they reverence and stand in awe of His name:

*[5] My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name. (Malachi 2)*

God also expected the priests to teach the truth and demonstrate it in the way they lived. In doing so, they would keep the people from sin:

*[6] True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. [7] For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 2)*

The priests of Malachi's day, however, had turned away from the truth. As a result, the people of God stumbled in their spiritual walk. God accused these priests of corrupting the covenant of Levi (2:8). As a result, God promised that they would be despised and humiliated before the people (2:9).

Because the priests did not faithfully teach the truth, the people of God wandered. They became “faithless” (2:11) and committed “abomination,” profaning the temple of the Lord through their alliance with foreign gods.

This faithlessness was seen not only with their God but also in their marriages and family life. They had been unfaithful to their wives. The Lord rebukes the men for divorcing their wives and refusing to show them the respect they deserved.

*[16] “For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.” (Malachi 2)*

The people of Malachi’s day had lost a sense of the glory and beauty of their God. The priests were no longer teaching the truth and found their responsibilities to be a burden. The worshippers who came to the temple were not being taught the truth of God and their obligations to Him. This resulted in the worshippers turning to other gods. Families in the nation were being broken up by divorce and disrespect for marriage partners. These were days of spiritual and moral decline.

In light of this spiritual and moral decline, God made a promise to His people through Malachi:

*[3:1] “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 3)*

Through Malachi, God told His people that a messenger would come to prepare the way of the Lord. The Lord

Jesus interprets this prophecy in Matthew 11 to refer to Himself and John the Baptist:

*[7] As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? [8] What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. [9] What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. [10] This is he of whom it is written,*

*"Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.' (Matthew 11)*

John the Baptist would be the messenger to come. He would announce the coming of the Lord Jesus to this world. Malachi tells us that when the Lord Jesus came, He would come like refiner's fire and fullers soap (3:2). In other words, He would come to purify and deal with the sin that separated His people from their God. Malachi promised that God would draw near to His people to judge them and cleanse their land of evil (3:5).

The Israelites, however, did not understand what Malachi was saying. God was calling them to return to Him, but they didn't know that they had wandered. The priests of the day did not understand the truth and had not been teaching it, so the people didn't understand the ways of God. In fact, when the Lord called His people to return, they asked: "How shall we return?" (3:7).

God explained through Malachi what the priests ought to have been teaching the people. He accused His people of robbing Him by not bringing their tithes and contributions. He told them that if they repented and brought their tithes to Him, His rich blessing would once again fall.



*[10] Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. (Malachi 3)*

God went on to tell the people that they had been speaking “hard things” against Him. Notice again that the people have no clue that they have been doing this and ask: “How have we spoken against you?” (3:13). God reminded them of what they had been saying:

*[14] You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts?’ (Malachi 3)*

In speaking these words, the people of God openly mocked the Lord and His ways. They proved that they did not love the Lord or respect Him and His purposes. Through Malachi, the Lord revealed the sin of His people. They did not even understand that they had been sinning. Their lack of instruction in the ways of the Lord blinded them to God’s purposes.

It appears that the message of Malachi had an impact. Among those who heard the word of Malachi were some who recognized their sin and turned to the Lord:

*[16] Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name. [17] “They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. (Malachi 3)*

God promised to remember those who returned to Him through the preaching of Malachi. He promised to spare

them in the day of His judgement. This, however, would not be the case for those who continued in their rebellion. Malachi describes a day that was coming for them in chapter 4.

*[4:1] "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. (Malachi 4)*

That day would be like a great oven burning the arrogant and evildoers. According to Malachi, the fire of God's wrath would leave them "neither root nor branch." In other words, they would be destroyed, never to rise again.

Listen to the promise of the Lord, however, through Malachi to those who repented and feared the Lord their God:

*[2] But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. [3] And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 4)*

There would be healing for those who feared the Lord. They would rejoice in the Lord and His presence. They would tread down the wicked under their feet.

Malachi concludes with a word about "Elijah." He prophesied that Elijah would come before the "awesome day of the Lord" (4:5).

*[5] "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. (Malachi 4)*

Jesus taught the people of His day that John the Baptist was the Elijah who was to come:

*[11] Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. [12] From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. [13] For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, [14] and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. (Matthew 11)*

Malachi declared the salvation of those who would turn to God. He told his people that this salvation would be accomplished through the Messiah who was to come. The Lord Jesus, announced by John the Baptist, would bring freedom and forgiveness. According to Malachi, the Messiah would turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and their children to their fathers and spare them from “utter destruction”:

*[6] And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction. (Malachi 4)*

The work of this Messiah, announced by John the Baptist, would restore relationships and renew the families of the nation. The Messiah would save His people from the judgement to come. In this Messiah, there would be hope, forgiveness, and healing.

Malachi spoke to a people who considered themselves to be religious, but they had not been instructed in the ways of the Lord. The priests of the day had failed in their obligations toward the people had not taught them. When confronted with their sins, the people could not understand what Malachi was telling them. They did not know how they had offended God. When instructed in what God required, some of them came to see their sin and repented.

What we need to see here is that ignorance is not an excuse for sin. God held the people of Malachi's day accountable even though their priests had failed to teach them. Malachi was sent as a prophet to show the people how they had fallen short of God's purpose. He revealed the plan of God for their marriages, their tithes and their attitudes toward God. He shed light on their sin and exposed their shortcomings.

We need people like Malachi today. How easy it is for us to blindly go our way without questioning if what we are doing is truly honouring to God and in His purpose. We can blindly follow our traditions and become stagnant in our relationship with God. Malachi awakens us from this blind pursuit and calls us to lift up our eyes and examine our ways in light of the truth of God's Word.

For Consideration:

What does the evidence in the prophecy of Malachi indicate about the date in which it was written?

What was the attitude of the priests of Malachi's day toward their duties? How had they neglected these duties?

What was the impact of the lack of priestly instruction in the nation?

What was the role of Malachi as he spoke to a nation ignorant of God's purpose?

Malachi announced a judgement to come. He also prophesied of a coming messenger who would prepare the way for the Messiah. What role would this Messiah play in the lives of His people?

For Prayer:

Have you ever forgot lessons the Lord taught you? Ask God to help you to be faithful in the things He teaches? Ask Him to help you never to forget these lessons.

Take a moment to confess the sinfulness of your nature that seems inclined toward sin. Thank the Lord that He has given us His Holy Spirit to indwell those who belong to Him, enabling them to live for God.

Ask God to give you a renewed zeal for Him and His purposes in your life? Ask Him to show you if you are blinded to certain sins in your life? If so, confess those sins and ask Him for victory over them.

Take a moment to thank the Lord for coming to this earth to set us free from our sin. Ask Him to help you to live a life that is worthy of His name.

Do you belong to a church where the Word of God is faithfully taught? Take a moment to thank the Lord for those who open your eyes to the truth of God and His purposes for your life.

Take a moment to pray for people who are not being instructed in the truth in the church they attend. Ask the Lord to help them to see the truth. Ask the Lord to send a prophet like Malachi to them to open their eyes to the purpose of God for them.



## Chapter 27 - New Testament Prophecy in the Early Days of Jesus

To this point, we have examined the ministry of prophecy in the Old Testament. We come now to the birth and early days of the Lord Jesus on this earth and to the role of the prophet in the New Testament period.

The story of the birth of the Lord Jesus is filled with prophecy. The Old Testament ends with a prophecy that a messenger would come to announce the coming of the Lord Jesus (see Malachi 2, 3). We read how that came about in Luke 1.

### Zechariah

As Luke begins his account about the Lord Jesus, he tells the story of a priest by the name of Zechariah who was serving the Lord at the temple during his appointed time. Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth had never had any children, and now they were “advanced in years” (Luke 1:7). As Zechariah ministered at the temple, an angel appeared to him. This angel had a message for Zechariah:

*[13] But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. [14] And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, [15] for he will be great before the*



*Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. [16] And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, [17] and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."*  
(Luke 1)

The angel revealed to Zechariah that he and his wife would have a son. That son would bring gladness to their hearts. God had a particular purpose for their child. He would be great before the Lord and minister in the power of Elijah.

Zechariah had difficulty believing what the angel had to tell him that day, but his wife did conceive and gave birth to a son, who would be known as John the Baptist. John's birth had already been announced by the prophet Malachi, but here in Luke 1, we read of the prophetic word of the angel to Zechariah declaring that he would be the father of the child spoken of by Malachi.

The angelic prophecy came true and when John the Baptist was born to Zechariah and Elizabeth, Zechariah his father, filled with the Holy Spirit, would himself prophesy about this event. His prophecy is recorded for us in Luke 1:67-79.

In his prophecy, Zechariah blessed the Lord God who had visited and redeemed his people by raising up a "horn of salvation" (1:68-69). That "horn of salvation" would save them from their enemies (1:71) so that those who were delivered would serve the Lord in holiness and righteousness all their days (1:74-75). Speaking about the child born to him, Zechariah prophesied:

*[76] And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,*

*[77] to give knowledge of salvation to his people  
in the forgiveness of their sins, (Luke 1)*

According to Zechariah, his son John would be called a prophet of the Most High. He would prepare the way for the Messiah who was prophesied from ancient times. That Messiah would bring salvation and forgiveness of sin to His people. Zechariah the priest not only heard the prophecy of the angel but he himself prophesied about the future of his own son.

### Elizabeth

John's mother Elizabeth also prophesied. In Luke 1:39-45 we read how Mary, who was then pregnant, visited Elizabeth. Luke tells us that when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby John, leaped in her womb. Elizabeth was filled with the Spirit and spoke:

*[41] And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, [42] and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! [43] And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? [44] For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. [45] And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." (Luke 1)*

There is a connection here between the Spirit of God filling Elizabeth and the words she spoke. That day she proclaimed that the fruit of Mary's womb was blessed. Elizabeth declared Mary to be the mother of her Lord. She also blessed Mary for believing the word that had been prophetically spoken to her by the angel. We are not sure if Elizabeth even knew these details prior to speaking these

words, as Mary had just arrived at her home. The prophetic words of Elizabeth, however, were designed to bring encouragement and strength to Mary at this time in her life.

### John the Baptist

We have seen how John's father, Zechariah prophesied that his son would be called a prophet of the Most High (Luke 1:76). How did John the Baptist fulfil his role as a prophet? He did so in several ways.

#### *John the Baptist announced the coming of the Messiah.*

This was the central theme of his prophetic word. He preached that the kingdom of God was at hand. That is to say, the king of this kingdom had come, and He would set up His kingdom

*[3:1] In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, [2] "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3)*

John pointed people to the Lord Jesus and to the work that He would do. He saw the work of Jesus as being of infinitely greater value than his own:

*[7] And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. [8] I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mark 1)*

According to the prophecy of John, Jesus would baptise His people with the Holy Spirit. That is to say; He would place His Holy Spirit in them to transform their lives.

On one occasion, seeing the Lord Jesus approach, John uttered these prophetic words:

*[29] The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! [30] This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' [31] I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." (John 1)*

According to John, Jesus was the Lamb of God who would be sacrificed for the sin of the world. Through Him would come salvation and deliverance from sin.

### *John announced the judgement of God*

While the central focus of John's prophetic ministry was to announce the coming of the Lord Jesus and the work would do, this was not the only aspect to his ministry. Like the Old Testament prophets before him, John also announced the judgement of the Lord to those who were walking in sin. Luke recounts how John would speak boldly to those who came to hear him speak:

*[7] He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? [8] Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. [9] Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Luke 3)*

John told the people of his day that the axe was laid to the root of the tree. In other words, the axe of God's wrath was ready to fall on the tree of their lives. John challenged those who listened to him to produce fruit "in keeping with repentance." He encouraged the people of his day to open

their eyes to the needs of those around them. If a brother or sister was in need, they were to offer them their tunic or provide them with the food they needed (Luke 3:10). He told tax collectors to stop oppressing people by collecting more than they were authorized to collect (Luke 3:12). He rebuked soldiers who extorted money by threat and false accusations (Luke 3:14). He called the religious leaders a "brood of vipers" (Matthew 3:7). Matthew 14:1-5 tells us that John the Baptist even rebuked Herod for taking his brother's wife. This accusation made Herod so angry that he imprisoned John and eventually beheaded him. John's role as a prophet is seen not only in how he announced the coming of the Lord Jesus but in how he boldly spoke out against the evils in his society.

## Angels

When the Lord Jesus was born, there were a series of prophetic statements made by the angels of heaven. Consider first the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary:

*[28] And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ... [31] And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. [32] He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, [33] and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

Gabriel informed Mary of the purpose of God for her life and how the child who would be born to her would rule over a kingdom that would never end.

When Joseph contemplated what to do with his pregnant fiancée, an angel appeared to him saying:

*[20] But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1)*

In his time of confusion, the angel brought a prophetic word to Joseph. The child Mary carried was from the Holy Spirit and had come to save His people from sin. The prophetic words given to Mary and Joseph at this time were intended to encourage and provide them with a sense of God's purpose for the child they would raise.

After the birth of the Lord Jesus, angels again appear with a word from the Lord. This time the word is for some shepherds in the field watching their sheep.

*[10] And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. [12] And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." (Luke 2)*

To these shepherds, the angels announced that the Christ had been born. They told the shepherds where they could find Him and how to identify Him.

Through the prophetic word, the angels announced the birth of Jesus. They also taught His people about the purpose of His coming. The prophetic words of the angels strengthened and encouraged both Mary and Joseph in the responsibilities God had given them to care for this young child.

## Simeon

Luke 2:25 tells us that there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. The Holy Spirit revealed to him that he would see the Lord's Christ before he died (Luke 2:26). Luke 2:27 tells us that "he came in the Spirit to the temple." While he was at the temple, Mary and Joseph arrived with the Lord Jesus. Taking the infant in his arms, Simeon prophesied:

*[29] "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in  
peace,*

*according to your word;*

*[30] for my eyes have seen your salvation*

*[31] that you have prepared in the presence of all peo-  
ples,*

*[32] a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and for glory to your people Israel." (Luke 2)*

Simeon proclaimed that this child would be the salvation of His people and a light of revelation to the Gentiles. Turning to Mary, Simeon said:

*[34] And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his  
mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and ris-  
ing of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed [35]  
(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so  
that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." (Luke  
2)*

Simeon also prophesied that the child he held in his arms had come both to judge and save many. He would be opposed by his people and Mary would be struck with grief as she watched what would happen to Him in His role as Saviour and Judge. These prophetic words prepared Mary for the coming crucifixion and rejection of the Lord Jesus.

It is worth mentioning that there was an elderly widow who remained at the temple in those days as well. Her name

was Anna, and she is described in Luke 2:36 as a prophetess. According to Luke 2:37-38, she remained at the temple worshipping, praying and speaking of Christ to all who were waiting for redemption and salvation.

It is important to note in this context that the gospel writers speak of the details surrounding the birth of the Lord Jesus as being a fulfilment of prophecy. Let me summarize this in the form of a chart:

Event	Reference	Prophecy
Virgin Birth of Jesus	Matthew 1:23	Isaiah 7:14
Location of Jesus Birth	Matthew 2:5-6	Micah 5:2
Jesus' time in Egypt	Matthew 2:15	Hosea 11:1
Herod's killing of young children	Matthew 2:18	Jeremiah 31:15
Ministry of John the Baptist	Luke 3:4; John 1:23	Isaiah 40:3-4; Malachi 3:1, 4:5

The prophets of the Old Testament predicted the details of the birth of the Lord Jesus and the events surrounding that birth. They spoke of that fact that He would be born of a virgin. They prophesied the town in which he would be born. They talked about how Jesus would go to Egypt as an infant and return from there to live in Nazareth. They warned of the slaughter of young children by Herod. They prophesied about John the Baptist who would announce the coming of Jesus. The birth of Christ and the early years of his life perfectly fulfilled the words of the prophets. This fulfilment of prophecy down to the smallest detail confirmed that He was the Messiah who was to come. Prophecy played a significant role in the early years of the Lord Jesus.



For Consideration:

How did the prophecy about Jesus and John the Baptist prepare the people of their day for their ministry?

Consider the prophecies given to Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, and Joseph. How did these prophecies prepare them for the work God had in store for them?

While the focus of John the Baptist was to announce the coming of the Lord Jesus as Messiah, he also had an important prophetic ministry in his community. How did he exercise this role of a prophet in his community?

How did the prophetic words of Simeon prepare Mary for the death of her son?

To what extent does prophecy about the details of the birth and events of the early life of Jesus confirm Him as the undisputed Messiah who was to come?

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord for how He perfectly fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies spoken about Him. Thank Him that we can have absolute confidence that He is the Messiah who was to come.

Thank the Lord for how He encouraged and strengthened His servants for the ministry He had for them through the prophetic word. Ask God to give you the grace to be His instrument to encourage and bless His people in their time of need.

John the Baptist boldly spoke to the people of his day about their sin. Ask the Lord to raise up prophets who will speak and teach the Word of God with boldness. Ask God to give them the ability to address the evils of our society.



## Chapter 28 - Old Testament Prophecy in the Life and Ministry of Christ

In the last chapter, we saw how Jesus' birth fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. I would like to take a moment in this chapter to examine how Jesus viewed Old Testament prophets and their prophecies.

Speaking to those who were persecuted for their faith in Matthew 5, Jesus said:

*[11] "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5)*

Notice how Jesus elevated the example of the prophets who faithfully preached the truth even when they were persecuted for doing so. He challenged those who suffered for their faith to look to these prophets as an example.

In Matthew 13:17 Jesus describes the Old Testament prophets, who longed for His coming, as righteous people:

*[16] But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. [17] For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. (Matthew 13:17)*

It is clear from these verses that the Old Testament prophets were true men and women of God who were to be respected and honoured for their role in the purpose of God. The people of Israel, however, did not always have this opinion of the prophets. Speaking in Luke 11, Jesus said:

*[49] Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' [50] so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, (Luke 11)*

The words of Jesus in these verses reminded the people of that day that they would be accountable for rejecting and killing the prophets God sent from the beginning of creation. These men and women were God's representatives, and their words were from God. By rejecting what they prophesied, the people of Jesus day were rejecting God and His Word.

Speaking to the disciples who walked with Him on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection, the Lord Jesus said:

*[25] And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! [26] Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24)*

Notice how Jesus calls these disciples foolish because they were slow to believe what the prophets had spoken. From the perspective of Jesus, these prophets spoke about Him, His death and His resurrection. They faithfully proclaimed the truth of God.

Speaking about the Old Testament prophets, in Matthew 5 the Lord Jesus said:

*[17] "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. (Matthew 5)*

As we have mentioned, the prophets of the Old Testament pointed to the Messiah who would come to rescue His people from sin. Jesus was the fulfilment of their prophetic words. Throughout His ministry, the Lord continually pointed His listeners to the ways in which He was the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament.

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples and said to them:

*[44] Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." (Luke 24)*

Jesus made it clear that everything written about Him by the Law and the Prophets "must be fulfilled." The words of the prophets were very much on the mind of the Lord as He lived His earthly life. He saw His life as an unfolding of the prophetic purpose of God as spoken of by the prophets His father had sent.

At the time of Jesus' arrest, a group of soldiers came to the garden where He and His disciples had been praying. One of the disciples drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. That boldness, however, did not last and eventually, he and the remainder of the disciples fled, leaving Jesus alone with those who had come to arrest Him. Speaking to those who remained in the garden, the Lord Jesus said:

*[53] Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? [54] But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" [55] At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. [56] But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets*

*might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples left him and fled.  
(Matthew 26)*

Jesus told the soldiers present that day that He could call on the Father and He would send angels to protect Him. He refused to do so, however. Instead, He chose to walk in the purpose of the Father revealed through the prophets. He submitted to this arrest so that the “Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled” (Luke 26:56).

One day Jesus went to the synagogue in the city of Nazareth. At that time, unrolling the scroll, He read from Isaiah 61:

*[18] “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has  
anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to  
proclaim liberty to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those  
who are oppressed,  
[19] to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4)*

When He finished reading, He rolled up the scroll, gave it to the attendant, and sat down to speak. With every eye on Him, He declared:

*[21] And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture  
has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4)*

He declared Himself to be the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. He had been anointed by the Father to preach and proclaim the good news. He had come to announce liberty to the captive and oppressed. He had come to heal the blind.

When Judas betrayed Jesus and delivered Him over to the religious leaders to be killed, Jesus once again saw this as a direct fulfillment of prophecy. Speaking to His disciples about this, He said:

*[18] I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' [19] I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. [20] Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."* (John 13)

There are two details we need to see in these verses. First, quoting from Psalm 41:9, Jesus reminded His disciples of the prophetic words of the psalmist who spoke about being betrayed by one who ate bread with him. Jesus told His disciples that this prophecy would be fulfilled in their midst. He was, of course, speaking about Judas, who would very soon betray them and hand Jesus over to the religious leaders.

The second, detail we need to see is found in the words of Jesus in John 13:20. Here He told His disciples that whoever received one He sent, received Him. Jesus reminded His disciples here of the importance of listening to the prophets He would send. They were to receive them as they would receive Jesus, for they spoke on His behalf.

As Jesus prepared His disciples for what was ahead, He told them that there would be hard times for them. Just as the world persecuted Him, so they would persecute His followers. The world would hate them and what they stood for. Jesus made it clear that this was also a fulfilment of the prophetic words of the psalmist in Psalm 35:19 and Psalm 69:4:

*[20] Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. [21] But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know*



*him who sent me. [22] If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. [23] Whoever hates me hates my Father also. [24] If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. [25] But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'* (John 15)

Notice how Jesus quotes the Old Testament in verse 25: "They hated me without a cause." This phrase is taken from Psalm 35:19 and Psalm 69:4. Jesus told His disciples that those words would be fulfilled during their ministry.

Jesus was very skilful in using the prophecy of the Old Testament in His teaching and encounters with the people of His day. Speaking to the grieving disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus used the Old Testament Law and Prophets to explain that He had to die and be raised again from the dead:

*[27] And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24)*

One day the disciples came to Jesus with a question. They were wondering about His teaching technique of speaking in parables. Listen to the response of Jesus in Matthew 13:

*[13] This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. [14] Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:*

*"You will indeed hear but never understand,  
and you will indeed see but never perceive."*

*[15] For this people's heart has grown dull,  
and with their ears they can barely hear,  
and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with*

*their eyes  
and hear with their ears and understand with their heart  
and turn, and I would heal them.'* (Matthew 13)

Jesus explained His teaching technique by pointing the disciples to the words of Isaiah the prophet. Isaiah prophesied to a people who heard but could not understand. Jesus told His disciples that this was the kind of people He was teaching. His parables simplified His lessons by illustrating them through everyday examples the people could grasp. Even in answering this simple question, Jesus returns to the teaching of the prophets for His answer.

While there are more illustrations of Jesus use of Old Testament prophecy, those I have cited are enough to help us to see how Jesus viewed the prophets. He saw Himself as the subject of many of the Old Testament prophecies. He lived His life with the realization that He was fulfilling the words of the prophets of old. He valued the words of the prophets sent by his father and taught that those who rejected the prophetic Scriptures would be condemned. He would often use the Old Testament prophets in His teaching and rebuked the foolishness of being slow to believe their words. Jesus respected the Old Testament prophets and their message and by His actions and words, reaffirmed them and their message.

For Consideration:

How did Jesus view the Old Testament prophets?

How did Jesus use the prophecy of the Old Testament in His ministry?

Is Old Testament prophecy important in our day? Is our tendency to avoid the Old Testament prophetic books “foolish”?

Jesus used the Old Testament prophets and the law to explain the message of the gospel to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Could you share the gospel using only the Law and the Prophets?

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord for how the prophecies of the Old Testament perfectly point to Him as the Saviour and Messiah who was to come.

Thank the Lord for how He confirms the authority of the Old Testament Prophets. Ask Him to show you the message of these prophets and its importance for our society today.

## Chapter 29 - Jesus as Prophet

We have seen how Jesus was the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. In the last chapter, we also examined how Jesus used Old Testament prophecy in His teaching. He had a high regard for these men and women who faithfully proclaimed the word of the Lord. What we want to examine in this chapter is the role of Jesus as a prophet.

In Matthew 21 we read the story of how the Lord Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem on a donkey. A great crowd welcomed him that day. There were many, however, who did not know Jesus. They asked those who gathered to see Him about Him:

*[10] And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" [11] And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee." (Matthew 21)*

Notice how the people of that day saw Jesus as a prophet: "This is the prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee," they said (Matthew 21:11).

After the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, He met some disciples traveling to Emmaus and engaged them in conversation. As he approached them, Jesus asked them what they had been speaking about. Listen to their response:

*[19] And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people (Luke 24)*

Notice again the reference to the fact that Jesus was "a prophet mighty in deed and word." The people of Jesus' day recognized Him as a prophet.

Beyond this, however, we have an account in Matthew 13:53-58 about how the Lord Jesus went to Nazareth to speak to the people of His own home town. While they marvelled at His wisdom, they could not accept what He said. Matthew tells us that they "took offense" at what Jesus told them. Listen to the response of the Lord Jesus to this rejection in Nazareth:

*[57] And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." (Matthew 13)*

In these words to the people of Nazareth, the Lord Jesus declared Himself to be a prophet. Jesus was not only seen as a prophet by the people of His day, but He also saw Himself as a prophet.

In our examination of the prophets of the Old Testament, we discovered that the prophetic ministry has many aspects. Each prophet seemed to have a different way of exercising his or her ministry. Some like Moses were teachers of the Law and revealers of God's purpose. Elijah and Elisha were mighty in signs and miracle. Jonah's message was a message of salvation. Amos spoke to the social injustice of his day. Jeremiah announced the judgement of God. Prophets like Daniel revealed future events. Haggai and Zechariah were encouragers. In the prophetic ministry of the Lord Jesus, we have evidence of all these characteristics.

*Prophetic Teaching*

In Matthew 5, we have a record of Jesus' sermon on the mount. Speaking to those present, the Lord Jesus said:

*[21] "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' [22] But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. (Matthew 5)*

Going on further in the passage we read:

*[27] "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' [28] But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5)*

In these verses, the Lord Jesus instructed the people of His day in the purpose of God. Notice how Jesus said: "You have heard it said." In other words, the Law of Moses told you that you were not to murder or commit adultery. Jesus would go on, however, to introduce a higher standard than that of the Law of Moses. He introduced this new standard with the phrase, "but I say to you." These words are repeated six times in these verses (Matthew 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44).

Like Moses, Jesus exercised His prophetic ministry by instructing His people in the purpose of the Father. He introduced them to a standard that went beyond external actions and traditions and demanded obedience from the heart, thought, and attitude. Jesus' prophetic teaching educated His people in the purpose of God for living under the new covenant He was going to establish through His death and resurrection.

### *The Announcement of the Judgement of God*

Like Jeremiah Jesus also exercised His prophetic ministry by announcing the judgment of God. As a prophet, Jesus did not hesitate to speak of the sin that separated His people from their God. Talking about religious people of His day, Jesus proclaimed:

*[21] "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. [22] On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' [23] And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' (Matthew 7)*

Jesus offers a stern warning to the religious of His day. He told them that just because they served Him did not mean that they belonged to Him. He warned them that the day was coming when many of their religious leaders would stand before His Father and hear Him say to them: "Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."

Speaking to cities that refused to repent of their sins the Lord Jesus said:

*[20] Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. [21] "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. [22] But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. (Matthew 11)*

Jesus announced the judgement of God on these cities because they did not turn to God even after seeing the “mighty works” of God.

In Matthew 21 Jesus entered the temple and what He saw made Him angry. Listen to Matthew’ account of that incident:

*[12] And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. [13] He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.” (Matthew 21)*

Jesus saw the money-changers, and the merchants gathered in the temple that day. They were offering a service to the people who came to bring their offerings. Some of these people came from different lands with their foreign currency. They needed to exchange their money when they arrived in Jerusalem. Instead of taking animals with them on this long journey, some of these Jewish believers brought money to purchase an offering when they arrived. While this exchange service may have been necessary, Jesus addressed the money-changers and merchants as “robbers” (verse 13). In other words, they were taking advantage of God’s people and seeking to make an excessive profit at their expense. Jesus, in anger, turned over the tables of the money-changers and merchants and spoke boldly against their immoral practice. As a prophet, the Lord Jesus saw the evil in what appeared to be a service to the people of the day and openly rebuked them for this.



### *Exposing Sin*

As a prophet, Jesus exposed the sin of the day. In many cases, the people Jesus spoke to were blinded to the reality of their sin and accepted their behaviour as normal. Jesus, however, opened their eyes to their sinful ways. Speaking about the religious leaders of His day, Jesus said:

*[23:1] Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, [2] "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, [3] so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. [4] They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. [5] They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, [6] and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues [7] and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. (Matthew 23)*

Jesus exposed the sinfulness of the religious leaders and showed them how they fell short of the purpose of the Father for their ministries. Jesus demonstrated that the ministry of the prophet is to expose sin that is hidden from our eyes and point us to the purpose of God.

### *Prophetic Insight*

Jesus also had prophetic insight into the things that were happening around Him. There are several examples of this in the gospels. On one occasion a ruler came to Jesus to tell him that his daughter had died. He wanted Jesus to lay His hands on her so that she would live again (Matthew 9:18-19). Jesus decided to go to the home of the ruler to

see his daughter. Matthew tells us what happened when Jesus arrived at the home of this ruler:

*[23] And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, [24] he said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. [25] But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. (Matthew 9)*

What is important for us to see here is the knowledge Jesus had about this young girl. "The girl is not dead but sleeping," he told those present. Her physical death had been evident to all present, but Jesus knew what they did not know. He knew the purpose of the heavenly Father to raise her up from the dead.

Mark recounts the story of the healing of a paralytic in Capernaum. Jesus was teaching in a home, and the crowds had gathered to hear Him. As He taught, four men removed a section of the roof of the house and dropped down a paralytic man for Jesus to heal. Listen to the words of Jesus to the paralytic:

*[5] And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." (Mark 2)*

Clearly, not all sickness is the result of personal sin. In this case, however, Jesus knew that this man had sinned, and his paralysis was the judgment of God for that sin. That day He forgave the sin of this paralytic. The result was that he was healed and rose up from his bed and walked out of the house.

In John 5 Jesus was passing through Jerusalem when He saw a man laying at a pool. This man had been invalid for thirty-eight years (John 5:3). Jesus approached him and engaged him in a conversation. During that conversation,

Jesus said to the man: "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." (John 5:8).

Later the Lord Jesus found the man in the temple. The words Jesus spoke to him are important:

*[14] Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you." (John 5)*

Notice again the prophetic insight of Jesus here. He knew that the man had been crippled all these years because of sin. He challenged him not to sin anymore, lest something worse happen to him. Jesus understood the reason for this man's affliction.

Let me give one more example of this prophetic insight of Jesus. In Mark 10 we read the story of a rich young ruler who approached Jesus and asked Him what he could do to have eternal life. After a brief conversation with the ruler, Jesus said:

*[21] And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." (Mark 10)*

The response of the young man is significant:

*[22] Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. (Mark 10)*

Jesus saw clearly this man's problem. He loved his riches and was unwilling to part with them. He loved his fortune more than he loved God. This is what kept him from eternal life. Jesus spoke as a prophet that day. He exposed hidden sin and revealed what kept this man from heaven.

*Prophetic Vision*

As a prophet, Jesus' vision was not limited to what His physical eyes could see. In Mark 11 Jesus was preparing to enter the city of Jerusalem on a donkey. In preparation for this, He told His disciples:

*"Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. [3] If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'"* (Mark 11)

Notice that Jesus knew exactly where this donkey would be. He knew that there would be a colt tied by it that no one had ever ridden. They were to untie the colt and bring it to Him. The disciples went into the city and found everything as Jesus had told them.

In John 1 Philip invited Nathanael to meet Jesus. Nathanael came to see Him with serious doubts about Jesus being the Messiah. As he approached, Jesus spoke to Nathanael and said:

*[47] Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"* (John 1)

Surprised that Jesus spoke as if He knew him, Nathanael replied: "How do you know me?" Jesus answered: "Before Philip called you when you were under the fig tree, I saw you" (John 1:48). When Nathanael heard this response of Jesus, he declared: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Nathanael was convinced that Jesus was the Son of God because Jesus spoke as a prophet who understood things about him that no one else could have known.

Speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well about her husband, she replied: "I have no husband," (John 4:17). Jesus replied:

*[17] ... "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; [18] for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."  
(John 4)*

Jesus knew details about this woman that she had never revealed to Him. This surprised the women who immediately said: "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet" (John 4:19). The Samaritan women saw Jesus as a prophet because he had knowledge of hidden facts about her life.

Let me give one more illustration of this prophetic sight. In Matthew 17 tax collectors came to Peter and asked about paying taxes. Listen to what the Lord Jesus told Peter to do:

*[27] However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself." (Matthew 17)*

Peter was to go to the sea, cast his hook into the water, and take the first fish that came up. He was to open the fish's mouth and take out a shekel and use the coin to pay their taxes. Jesus saw what no one else saw. He saw with spiritual eyes the location of that coin and knew exactly what was required to get it. As a prophet, Jesus saw with spiritual eyes what was normally hidden from physical eyes.

### *Foretelling the Future*

The spiritual eyes of the prophet also showed Jesus what would come to pass in the future. Time does not permit us

to examine the many predictions of Jesus in detail. By way of example, however, let's look at a few of these prophecies.

Speaking to His disciples in Matthew 12, Jesus prophesied:

*[16] "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.*

*[17] Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, [18] and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. (Matthew 12)*

Jesus told his disciples that persecution awaited them as they served Him and preached the good news.

He told the Scribes and Pharisees that he would be killed and lay in the grave for three days:

*[40] For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (Matthew 12)*

In Matthew 24-26 Jesus prophesied about many things that were to happen after He returned to the Father. He spoke of the destruction of the temple (24:1-2). He told His disciples that there would be many false Christs (24:4-5), wars (24:6-7) and the persecution of believers (24:9). In these difficult times, many would fall from the faith and betray one another (24:10). Before He returned, there would be great signs in the sky, and the powers of heaven would be shaken (24:29). We have yet to see the fulfilment of these words of Jesus, but they warn us of what is to come for those who love and serve Him.

As a prophet, Jesus spoke what the Father gave Him to say. He made this clear when He told the Jews:

*[16] ... "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.*

*[17] If anyone's will be to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. (John 7)*

He repeated this same thought when he said:

*[28] ... "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. (John 8)*

Jesus spoke the words of the Father who sent Him. He taught what the Father gave Him and spoke in the authority of the Father because His teaching was from the Father. This is the nature of the prophetic ministry. The prophet is taught by God, and he or she speaks what the Father gives them to those to whom they are sent.

As a prophet, Jesus taught the purpose of God for His people. He announced the judgment of God and exposed sins that had been accepted in His day. He had prophetic insight into the purpose of God in ordinary circumstances and a vision from God that allowed him to see what could not be seen with the human eye. As a prophet, He also revealed details of what was yet to come.

Prophecy is often seen as the prediction of future events. While this is an element of the prophetic ministry, Jesus makes it clear that true prophecy has to do with a revelation of God's purpose and will even in the present. Many of the prophets of both the Old and New Testament spoke to the people of their day, challenging them in their walk with God and in His purpose for their lives.

For Consideration:

What is the connection between the prophetic ministry and teaching? To what extent must a prophet teach?

What is the connection between the prophetic announcement of judgment and evangelism? To what extent does a prophet evangelize?

Prophecy exposes hidden sin. How important is it to speak to these issues in the church today? What would be the response to a prophet who spoke to the hidden sins in your church today?

Jesus, as a prophet, had prophetic insight into the lives of those who approached Him. He also understood the purpose of God for the struggles in their lives. How important is this discernment in the church today?

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord Jesus for demonstrating the ministry of the prophet through His life and ministry.

Ask the Lord Jesus to reveal any sins that you need to address in your life.



Thank the Lord that He knows your heart and the future He has for you. Thank Him that nothing will take Him by surprise in your life. Ask Him to help you to walk in that purpose.

## Chapter 30 - Prophecy in the Book of Acts

The ministry of prophecy continued to be a respected ministry in the early church. I want to take a moment here in this chapter to examine prophecy in the book of Acts.

As the book of Acts opens, we read of how Peter spoke to the early church and reminded them that the prophecy of David had been fulfilled concerning Judas who had betrayed Jesus (Acts 1:16). Peter went on to tell the church, however of the words of David in two Psalms. The first Psalm Peter brings to the attention of the church is Psalm 69:25:

*[25] May their camp be a desolation;  
let no one dwell in their tents. (Psalm 69)*

Peter believed this psalm to be prophetic in nature. He saw in it a reference to Judas and how he had betrayed the Lord resulting in his camp being desolate. Judas' place was now empty. The words of David had become true for Judas.

Peter went on to quote another passage from David. This time he quoted from Psalm 109:8:

*[8] May his days be few;  
may another take his office!*

Again, in these words, the apostle Peter saw a prophetic message. He saw Judas whose days had been cut short. He also saw a command of the Lord for another person to

take the office of Judas. It was on the basis of these words that the apostle suggested that they chose men from among them who would be qualified to fulfil the role of apostle and ordain one of them to replace Judas. This resulted in Matthias being selected to be an apostle. The selection of a new apostle was motivated by the words of David, which were seen as prophetic instructions for the church at that time.

In Acts 2 we read about how the Holy Spirit fell on those who heard Peter preach at Pentecost. As the Spirit moved in their midst, the apostles began to speak in other languages. People listened to the message of the gospel in their own tongue. This confused those who listened. What was happening? How was it that these men could speak their language? Sensing this confusion, Peter addressed the crowd and said:

*“Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. [15] For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. [16] But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:*

*[17] “And in the last days it shall be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams;*

*[18] even on my male servants and female servants  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall  
prophesy. (Acts 2)*

There are a couple of details we need to see from this word of Peter. Notice first that Peter explained what was happening that day as a fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel. Peter believed that Joel's prophecy was coming true in their day. There is no question about how Peter viewed

prophecy in his day. He allowed prophecy to guide him and used it to explain what was taking place in his day.

Beyond this, however, Peter used prophecy to back up what he preached. He preached that Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. He told his listeners that David had prophesied that the Lord would rise from the dead:

*[25] For David says concerning him,  
"I saw the Lord always before me,  
for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;  
[26] therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue re-  
joiced;  
my flesh also will dwell in hope.  
[27] For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,  
or let your Holy One see corruption. (Acts 2)*

Peter explained that this prophecy spoke about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead:

*[30] Being therefore a prophet and knowing that God had  
sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his de-  
scendants on his throne, [31] he foresaw and spoke  
about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not  
abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.  
(Acts 2)*

In Acts 3 Peter used the prophecy of Moses to challenge his listeners to repent.

*[19] Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may  
be blotted out, [20] that times of refreshing may come  
from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the  
Christ appointed for you, Jesus, [21] whom heaven must  
receive until the time for restoring all the things about  
which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long  
ago. [22] Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you*

*a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. (Acts 3)*

He reminded his listeners how Moses prophesied that God would raise up a prophet like him. According to Peter, that prophet was Jesus who came to set them free from the burden of sin and law.

When challenged by the high priest about his authority, Peter boldly proclaimed that it was in the name of Jesus that he spoke and found his authority. This Jesus was the one of whom the psalmist prophesied when he wrote:

*[22] The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone. (Psalm 118:22)*

Peter saw the rejection of the religious leaders as the fulfilment of these prophetic words of David. Peter recognized the fulfilment of prophecy in his day and encouraged people to consider seriously what the prophets said.

Peter was not the only apostle to use prophecy in his preaching. In Acts 13 the apostle Paul preached the message of the gospel to the people of Antioch. Quoting from both Isaiah and the Psalms in Acts 13:16-43, Paul explained to the people of Antioch how prophecy spoke of Jesus and His work.

Both Peter and Paul believed the prophecies of the Old Testament to be an authoritative guide into truth. They trusted what these prophets spoke and preached confidently quoting from them.

To this point, we have spoken about how the apostles used the prophecies of the Old Testament. We need to understand, however, that the prophetic gift was not limited to the Old Testament only. We have a record of the gift of prophecy being used in the early church as well. God continued to speak and reveal His purpose to both the apostles and ordinary believers in the early church.

Consider, for example, the case of Ananias and Sapphira as recorded in Acts 5:1-11. In those days, God was moving powerfully in the lives of the believers. They were selling their lands and possessions and distributing the funds received to the needy of their community. Ananias and his wife Sapphira joined with the other believers in selling their property and brought the money to the apostles for distribution.

When Ananias received the proceeds from the sale of his property, he kept back a portion and brought the remainder to the apostles. While this was in his right to do so, Ananias intended to deceive the church into thinking that he had given one hundred percent of the proceeds to the Lord. Listen to the words of Peter, however, when Ananias came with his donation:

*[3] But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? (Acts 5)*

Notice that Peter was aware of what had taken place. It appears that this was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. God spoke directly to Peter to expose this deceit. In bringing this to light, the Lord was protecting His church. One of the aspects of prophecy is that it reveals the secrets of the heart and exposes sin. Peter appeared to be exercising this gift and confronted the sin of Ananias.

We see a similar event in the ministry of the apostle Paul in Acts 14:8-10. Paul was ministering in the region of Lystra when he met a man who had been crippled from birth. Notice what verse 9-10 tell us:

*[9] He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, [10] said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking. (Acts 14)*

What is important for us to note here is that Paul looked at the man and saw that he had faith to be made well. This was not something that can be seen with physical eyes. God gave Paul the ability to see what his physical eyes could not see. He revealed to Him that the man was ready to be healed. It was based on this prophetic insight that Paul cried out, "Stand upright on your feet."

God revealed hidden details to Peter and Paul. Peter was given prophetic insight to see the deceit of Ananias. Paul was given that same insight to know the purpose of God to bring healing to the crippled man. Both Peter and Paul trusted that insight and acted upon it for the glory of God.

There were times when the will of God was not clear for the early church. This was particularly the case when it came to the role and place of the Gentile in the body of Christ. For many of the early believers, the Gentiles were unclean and unworthy of salvation. They refused to associate with them. It was the purpose of God, however, to reach out to the Gentiles and bring His salvation to them as well. One of these Gentiles was a man by the name of Cornelius. As a religious man, Cornelius sought to walk in the ways of God. One day he had a vision of an angel of God calling out to him. Cornelius answered the angel and asked him what he wanted. The angel told him to call for Simon Peter (Acts 10:4-5). Cornelius did not hesitate to listen to the words of the angel and sent for Peter.

While God had spoken to Cornelius, He also needed to talk to Peter. Peter was of the mentality that salvation belonged to the Jews and that Gentiles were unclean and unworthy of the salvation of God. Peter was praying on the roof of the home where he was staying. As he prayed, Peter fell into a trance (Acts 10:10). In this trance, he saw heaven open, and a sheet descended with all kinds of unclean animals.

The apostle heard a voice call out for him to rise, kill and eat (Acts 10:12). His response was to tell the Lord that as a good Jew, he had never eaten anything that was unclean according to the Old Testament law. In his vision, however, God told Peter that he was not to call anything God had made unclean. This scene was repeated three times. Peter did not understand the vision, but as he was contemplating what it could mean, three men came to the door to ask him to go with them to Cornelius. Assured by God that this was His will, Peter went to the home of this Gentile man. When he shared the message of the gospel with him and his family, Cornelius came to know the Lord Jesus.

The Lord revealed His purpose directly to Peter through a prophetic vision. In that vision, the Lord showed Peter that he had a purpose for the Gentiles. Were it not for that vision, Peter might never have considered speaking to Cornelius.

We have seen how God often called prophets to speak out against the sin of the day. In Acts 7:51-53 we read about Stephen and his message.

*[51] "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. [52] Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, [53] you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it." (Acts 7)*

Stephen proclaimed the judgement of God on the people of his day. His boldness led to his death when people lashed out in anger against him and his message, just like they did many other prophetic figures before him.

In Acts 8, the Lord spoke to Philip and sent him with a message for an Ethiopian who was passing through the



desert. Philip was sent as a prophet to communicate the will of God for the salvation of this Ethiopian official.

We read the story of Ananias in Acts 9. After the conversion of the apostle Paul, the Lord sent him to speak to Paul about his future. While Ananias hesitated to talk to a man who had been a powerful enemy of the church, the Lord revealed to him that Paul would become an instrument of God to carry His name to the Gentiles.

*[15] But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. [16] For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."*  
(Acts 9)

Ananias went with this prophetic word from the Lord and informed Paul that he would suffer much to advance the cause of the Lord Jesus he had persecuted. Paul would receive this prophetic word as from the Lord.

Acts 11 recounts the story of some prophets who came from Jerusalem to Antioch.

*[27] Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. [28] And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). [29] So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. [30] And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul. (Acts 11)*

When Agabus prophesied that there would be a great famine, the believers determined that they would respond appropriately. They sent relief to the elders of the various churches through Barnabas and Saul. The prophetic word of Agabus was not doubted. It stirred the believers to action and resulted in the support of those in need.

What do we learn about the prophetic ministry in the book of Acts? We see that the apostles stood firmly behind the Old Testament prophets and their message. Their preaching was solidly founded on the prophecy of these saints of God. They interpreted the events of their day in light of the prophecy of the Old Testament.

Prophecy was not limited to the words of the Old Testament prophets, however. God continued to speak directly to believers in the book of Acts. God revealed the sin of Ananias to Peter. He showed Paul his purpose for the man who was crippled from birth. It was through a prophetic vision that the Lord revealed to Peter that He had a plan for the Gentiles. Philip, who was not an apostle, was sent by God with a word for the Ethiopian official who was seeking to understand the Scripture he was reading. God sent Ananias to speak to Paul about what he had in store for him in the years to come. The church did not question the words of Agabus who predicted a famine in the land. In fact, they demonstrated their belief in the message of Agabus by making great sacrifices for the welfare of the believers in Judea.

God continued to speak through His servants (both apostles and ordinary servants). There is no indication of the ministry of prophet ceasing in the book of Acts. The church continued to be directed by God in particular ways through this ministry. God continued to send His prophets to reveal His purpose, expose sin, and direct His people.

For Consideration:

How did Old Testament prophecy direct the New Testament church? What practical matters were addressed as a result of Old Testament prophecy?

How did the apostles use Old Testament prophecy in their preaching and teaching?

Give some examples, from the book of Acts about how God revealed hidden secrets to his servants.

Give some examples, from the book of Acts about how God gave a word to His servants for someone else.

What did Ananias and Agabus reveal from the Lord about the future?

What did the response of the church to the prophecy of Agabus about a coming famine reveal about how the church in Acts felt about the prophetic ministry?

### For Prayer

Thank the Lord for the ministry of His servants the prophets in the Old and New Testaments who revealed to us the truth about God and His purposes.

Thank the Lord for how He continued to reveal Himself through His servants in the book of Acts.

Ask the Lord to give you an open heart and mind to hear from His Word and His Spirit.



## Chapter 31 - Paul's Teaching on Prophecy

In the book of Acts, we saw that the ministry of the prophet was still a respected and operational ministry in the church. It now falls on us to examine the teaching of Paul about the use of the prophetic gift and office in the New Testament church.

We have seen how the apostles used the Old Testament prophets to preach the message of the gospel. In his epistles, the apostle Paul demonstrates that he saw these prophets as speaking authoritatively on the matter of salvation. Consider his opening statement in the book of Romans:

*[Romans 1:1] Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, [2] which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, [3] concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh [4] and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, [5] through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, [6] including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ (Romans 1)*

Paul told the Romans that he had been called to be an apostle for the gospel of God which had been promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scripture.

Paul makes it clear that the messages of these prophets were authoritative and trustworthy. The gospel was not a new idea, but the purpose of God from ages past. This was confirmed through the prophetic words of the Old Testament prophets.

These prophets spoke of a righteousness that would come apart from the practice of the Old Testament law:

*[21] But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— [22] the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: (Romans 3)*

The message Paul preached was an unfamiliar message to the Jews of his day. For the Jew of Paul's day, it was of utmost importance that one practice the law of Moses. They could not imagine salvation apart from this practice. Paul taught that salvation had nothing to do with the law of Moses. He supported and proved this by reminding those who heard him that the Old Testament prophets bore witness to this teaching.

This salvation that Paul preached was not just for the Jew but also the Gentile. Paul confidently preached to the Gentiles inviting them to join the Jews in the salvation being offered freely to all who came to Christ. This was a radical step for his time. Paul's assurance that salvation was also for the Gentile came through the clear teaching of the prophets of the Old Testament. Writing to the Ephesians, the apostle said:

*[4] When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, [5] which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.  
[6] This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs,*

*members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*

The prophets preached that the Gentiles would be fellow heirs of salvation. Paul believed this revelation and invited the Gentiles to come to Christ. He based his ministry on the revelations of these Old Testament saints and preached a message of righteousness apart from the law.

Paul saw the words of the prophets to be authoritative and inspired by God. The teachings of these men and women of faith were part of the sacred Scriptures that Paul revered.

While all Scripture is prophetic, not all prophecy is Scripture. Paul recognized that there were prophets whose words would never be part of Scriptures. These individuals, however, still had an important function to play in the church. Paul believed in the office of prophet in the church. Writing to the Corinthians, the apostle would say:

*[28] And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. [29] Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? [30] Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? (1 Corinthians 12)*

The apostle told the Corinthians that God gave spiritual gifts to the church. Notice that one of those gifts was the gift of prophecy (verse 28). This was not a gift that every believer possessed. God gave some to be apostles. Others, He made prophets. Others were given the role of teacher. Each person had a task to accomplish in the church of Jesus Christ. According to Paul, God appointed prophets in the New Testament church.



The apostle Paul repeated this same thought to the Ephesians when he told them:

*[10] He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) [11] And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, [12] to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, [13] until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4)*

According to Paul, the Lord gave the New Testament church apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers. The purpose of these roles was to build up the body, so it matured into the fullness of Christ. Paul believed that the function of the prophet was not just to write Scripture but also to encourage and build up believers in the church.

Paul encouraged the use of prophetic gifts in the New Testament church. He told those who had such a gift to use it in proportion to their faith:

*[6] Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith (Romans 12)*

In other words, if prophets believed they had a word from the Lord, they were to share this with the understanding that God had given it to them for the good of the church.

*[7] To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. [8] For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, [9] to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, [10] to another the working of miracles, to*

*another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. [11] All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. (1 Corinthians 12)*

Paul specifically mentioned the gift of prophecy in verse 10. This gift, according to Paul was given by God to the New Testament church as He saw fit. Those who had this gift were to be careful to use it for the good of the church.

Paul expressed his appreciation for the gift of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14 when he told the Corinthians to pursue love and desire spiritual gifts, especially prophecy.

*[14:1] Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. (1 Corinthians 14)*

He repeats this later in the same chapter when he said:

*[39] So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. (1 Corinthians 14)*

Notice the words, "earnestly desire." Paul wanted the believers in Corinth not only to respect the gift of prophecy but zealously seek after this gift. Of all the spiritual gifts mentioned in Scripture, this is the one gift Paul seems to desire more than others. He warned the Thessalonians not to despise prophecies:

*[20] Do not despise prophecies, [21] but test everything; hold fast what is good. (1 Thessalonians 5)*

In challenging the Thessalonians to test everything, Paul recognizes that there is the potential for false prophets to lead people astray. He does not want to see the gift of prophecy ignored because of a chance of false prophets, so he encouraged the testing of all prophetic words to be sure they were from God.

Paul believed that prophecy was for the good of the church and had a significant role to play in a mature church. Speaking to the Corinthians, the apostle said:

*[14:1] Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. [2] For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. [3] On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. [4] The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. [5] Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.*

Notice how Paul the Corinthians that the gift of prophecy had a three-fold purpose –upbuilding, encouragement and consolation (see verse 3). Through this gift, God would strengthen the church, encourage it in the way it should go, and bring it comfort in suffering. The prophetic ministry has a wide variety of applications for the church.

It is worth noting how Paul compared the gift of prophecy with the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians 14. The individual who spoke in a tongue spoke in words that were not understandable unless they were interpreted. Notice, however, that the person who spoke in tongues “utters mysteries in the Spirit.” When interpreted, these words could be for the building up of the church and had a prophetic purpose.

According to Paul, prophecy was also intended to bring conviction and expose the secrets of the heart.

*[24] But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, [25] the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling*

*on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you. (1 Corinthians 14)*

How often have we sought to move the church forward only to be met by obstacles? Many of these obstacles are spiritual and cannot be seen with the human eye. The prophet of God is given insight into the hidden secrets and hindrances to the work of the kingdom of God. This gift allows the prophet to see what others cannot see. When obstacles are exposed and dealt with, the work of God can advance. If the church is going to progress, we need to hear from God, and we need people who are gifted to see what God wants to show us.

What is true for the church is also true for our personal lives. There are times when we need to hear from God about hindrances and sins that we cannot see ourselves. The role of the prophet is to hear from God and expose those sins and obstacles.

Writing to Timothy, the apostle Paul said:

*[18] This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare (1 Timothy 1)*

Apparently, Timothy had a prophetic word spoken to him about his ministry. Paul encouraged him to accept this word as being from the Lord and to fight a good fight for the cause of Christ. The prophetic words uttered to Timothy were intended to give him courage and direction in the ministry God had for him.

There appears to be an even greater connection between Timothy and the prophetic word spoken to him. In 1 Timothy 4 the apostle wrote:

*[14] Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. (1 Timothy 4)*

Paul speaks in this verse of a gift that was given to Timothy by prophecy when the elders laid hands on him. While it is difficult to understand what happened that day, it appears that as Timothy was being ordained to the ministry, a word of prophecy was spoken. That word was a word from God to Timothy giving him a direction and purpose in his calling. Through this prophecy, God commissioned Timothy to a specific task and showed him what He had for him to do. Along with that prophetic word, came the authority and gifting necessary to accomplish his role. It was by means of a prophetic word that Timothy was given clarity and authority to exercise his ministry.

While Paul believed that prophecy was an important aspect of the ministry of the church, he also realized that there was potential for confusion through this ministry as well. In 1 Corinthians Paul gives some basic guidelines on how to prophecy.

Paul speaks first to women in the church of Corinth. The gift of prophecy is given to both men and women equally. Paul, however, advised women to cover their head when they prophesied in church.

*[4] Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, [5] but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. (1 Corinthians 11)*

We do not have the time here to discuss the matter of head coverings. Suffice it to say that Paul is teaching that women who prophesied were to be respectful and submissive in their speaking. They were not to take control or

assert authority over the leadership of the church through their gift.

Paul also admonished those with the gift of prophecy to exercise it in love.

*[2] And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. (1 Corinthians 13)*

Sometimes the words the prophet spoke were difficult. God would sometimes challenge the church in areas of sin and rebellion. When delivering their message, the prophet was to do so with love in his or her heart, seeking the well-being of the people of God. Jonah is an example of a prophet who delivered his message without love.

The early church allowed time for prophecy during its worship service. This was a time when the Lord would speak to the congregation to bless or challenge them in His purpose. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul gave some practical guidelines to the church of Corinth in regard to prophecy in their regular times together.

*[29] Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. [30] If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. [31] For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, [32] and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. (1 Corinthians 14)*

Paul makes some significant points in this passage. Let's consider them briefly.

Paul told the church in Corinth that two or three prophets should speak. In saying this, he is limiting the number of people who could prophecy in any meeting. It was not the intention of Paul that prophecy take over the church service.

Second, Paul told the church that when a prophet was speaking others were to weigh what was said. In other words, the church was to consider carefully what the prophet was saying and its application to their lives. They were to take the word of the prophecy seriously because by means of this word, the Lord was speaking to them. They were also to weigh the words of the prophet against the teaching of Scripture to be sure that it was from God.

Third, Paul told the church that those who prophesied were to speak one at a time. There was a reason for this. The purpose of prophecy was to communicate the heart of God to His people. If many prophets were speaking at the same time, the people of God could not hear what was said. Instead of a clear word from the Lord, there would be confusion.

Four, if someone was speaking and another person had a revelation from God, the first person was to sit down and listen to the second. In other words, if God was clarifying a matter through the second prophet, it was important that the people hear that clarification. Prophets were to be willing to sit down and give the floor to another person if God was speaking to them. This required humility and seeking God's heart.

Five, notice the purpose of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14:31 – *“so that all may learn and all be encouraged.”* God spoke through His prophets to teach and encourage His people. This was to be the intention of the prophets when they shared the message God was putting on their heart.

Finally, notice that Paul told the Corinthians that the spirit of the prophets was to be subject to the prophets. There are two ways we can understand this phrase. First, the words of the prophets are subject to the examination and judgement of other prophets. So that when a prophet spoke, other prophets would listen and judge what he or

she was saying to see if it was from God. Second, we can also understand this to imply that when a prophet spoke, he or she did not have such high regard for themselves that they would not listen to what other prophets were saying. They would willingly sit down when that Lord began to speak through another prophet. They who expected others to hear them when they had a word from the Lord, were also to listen to other prophets with the same attentiveness. They were not to consider their message as being more important than anyone else's. This kept the prophets humble. We might also understand this word of Paul to refer to the written prophecy in Scripture. In other words, the words of the prophet were to always fall in line with the Scriptures.

I have already mentioned that while all Scripture is prophetic, not all prophecy is Scripture. The implication of this is that while God was speaking through His servants, their words did not carry the same authority as Scripture. In 1 Corinthians 14, in giving his guidelines for the use of prophecy in the church, Paul concludes with this statement:

*[37] If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 14)*

Paul is telling the Corinthian prophets that what he was writing were the commands of the Lord. The guidelines Paul brought to the church of Corinth were not merely his opinion but the authoritative and definitive Word of God. As prophets, Paul expected them to submit to this Word. Any prophetic statement that went counter to what he taught was to be rejected. All prophecy was to be evaluated by the Word of God. If what a prophet said ran counter to the teaching of that Word, he or she was preaching falsehood.



Paul recognized that that day would come when prophecy would no longer be necessary.

*[8] Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. [9] For we know in part and we prophesy in part, [10] but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. (1 Corinthians 13)*

Prophecy, tongues and the teaching of knowledge would one day be unnecessary. The reason for this is that we will be in the presence of the Lord. We will hear from Him directly. We will know Him and no longer need to be taught the truth for we will understand that truth. Until that day arrived, however, prophecy would remain.

For Consideration:

How did the apostle Paul use the prophecy of the Old Testament to give authority to his message?

Paul taught that the gift of prophecy was a gift given to the church? Do you see evidence of this gift in your church?

Why is the gift of prophecy rejected by many churches of our day?

How did Paul's guidelines to the use of prophecy in the church help identify false prophets and those who prophesied with wrong motives?

What is the difference between the authoritative Word of God as found in Scripture and the prophetic word spoken in the church?

For Prayer:

As God to help you to better understand the gift of prophecy and its purpose in the church.

Thank the Lord that He continues to speak to us through His servants. Ask Him to help you to be more open to the things He wants to teach you through these servants.

Ask the Lord to help us as believers today to demonstrate true humility in the prophetic ministry. Ask God to expose those whose motivation is self-centred.

As the Lord to help you to be open to what He might want you to communicate to others. Ask Him to give you ears to hear what He wants to say and eyes to see what He wants you to see.



## Chapter 32 - The Apostle John

Apart from the Lord Jesus, the apostle John was probably one of the greatest prophets in the New Testament. The entire book of Revelation is devoted to his prophecy. It is not our purpose here to interpret the prophecies of John in the book of Revelation. It is, however, helpful to examine John as a prophet and to examine the various aspects of his prophetic message.

The prophecy of John in the book of Revelation can be divided into two sections. The first of these sections is found in Revelation 1-3. In these chapters, the Lord gives John a series of messages for seven local churches in Asia. The remainder of the book speaks about the end times and what is going to happen as the end draws near.

John was on the island of Patmos when the Lord spoke to him and gave him a message for the seven churches in Asia.

*[10] I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet [11] saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." (Revelation 1)*

Notice that John tells us that he heard a loud voice speaking to him. As there is no record of anyone else present that day, we cannot say if the voice John heard could be

heard by anyone else. It is clear, however, that the Lord spoke directly to John with words he could hear.

Words, however, were not the only means of communication with John. When the apostle turned to look in the direction of the voice he heard, he describes what he saw:

*[12] Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, [13] and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. [14] The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, [15] his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. [16] In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. (Revelation 1)*

John saw the Lord Jesus “in the midst of” seven lampstands with seven stars in His right hand. He was told that the lampstands represented seven churches and the stars in the Lord’s right hand were the seven angels of these churches (see Revelation 1:20). This image was very symbolic and reminded John that the Lord was with these churches and held their leaders in His hands.

What is crucial for us to see here is how the Lord spoke to John. He spoke in words that John heard and through pictures and symbols that needed interpretation.

The prophetic messages of John to the churches of Revelation 2 and 3 demonstrate four characteristics. By examining these four characteristics, we gain some insight into the purpose of prophecy.

First, John’s messages to the seven churches have as their purpose to expose what was hidden from human

view. Consider the words of the Lord through John to the church in Ephesus:

*[2] "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. [3] I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. [4] But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. (Revelation 2)*

The Lord reveals to the church that He was aware of their toil, patient endurance and faithfulness to the truth. To all appearances, this church was a very vibrant church standing firmly for the truth. In Revelation 2:4, however, the Lord exposed an issue that even the members of the church had not seen. He reminded that they had lost their first love. This was not a detail that John would have known personally. It was revealed to him by the Lord.

We see a similar detail in the letter to the church of Sardis:

*[3:1] "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. "I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. [2] Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. (Revelation 3)*

Notice that the Lord told the church of Sardis that they had a reputation of being alive but were dead. To all appearances, the church of Sardis was a vibrant church. God, however, revealed through John that this was not the case. God saw what human eyes could not see. He saw the heart of the church and exposed its deadness. The prophetic messages of John revealed hidden sins and secrets.

As a Christian leader, I have often been aware of my inability to understand the real issues in the church and relationships? I remember one time praying about this, and the Lord seemed to give me a picture of a blindfolded man swinging his sword. Knowing that the enemy was all around him, he swung that sword blindly hoping that the sword would strike its mark. How successful can we in the battle before us if we cannot see the enemy or are deceived into fighting the wrong enemy? We need to see as God sees. The prophetic messages of John exposed what was unseen to the human eye and gave the church a precise target to overcome.

Second, John's prophecies brought the encouragement of the Lord to the seven churches of Asia. Consider the words of the Lord through John to the church of Smyrna:

*[9] "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. [10] Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Revelation 2)*

Here was a church that did not have much. They were struggling with poverty and tribulation. Through John, however, the Lord told the church that He considered them to be rich. Notice that while the church would continue to face persecution God promised that their suffering would be limited, and those who persevered would receive a crown of life. We can only imagine the encouragement this would have brought to the church of Smyrna in their tribulation.

Consider also the words of John to the church of Philadelphia:

*[8] "I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. [9] Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. [10] Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. [11] I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. [12] The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. (Revelation 3)*

Through John, the Lord told the church of Philadelphia that God was aware of their weakness and that they had been faithful to Him. He prophesied that God would keep them from the trial that was going to fall on the earth. To a church that was feeling weak, how encouraging it would have been to know that God was pleased with them and would protect and keep them from being overwhelmed by the trials that came their way. Through his prophetic ministry, the apostle John brought the encouragement of the Lord to those in need of support and comfort.

Third, John's prophecies not only exposed the sin of the seven churches but also called for repentance. Writing to the church in Pergamum the apostle would say:

*[14] But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. [15] So also you have some who hold the*



*teaching of the Nicolaitans. [16] Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. (Revelation 2)*

God reminded that church of Pergamum of their sins, and through the apostle John warned them of the danger of continuing on this path. He called them to repent or suffer the consequences of their sin.

To the church of Thyatira, the apostle John said:

*[19] “I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. [20] But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. [21] I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. [22] Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, [23] and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. (Revelation 2)*

The Lord called the church of Thyatira to repent for their toleration of immorality in their midst. John warned them that if they did not repent, God would strike them. Sometimes the message of the prophet is a harsh message, revealing the anger of God toward sin and rebellion. The prophet not only exposes sin but calls the sinner to repentance.

Finally, John's prophetic messages gave the church an understanding of future events. We have already seen how God told the church of Smyrna that they would be further testing for them (see Revelation 2:10). He also informed

the church in Philadelphia that an hour of trial was coming, but God would keep them from this trial (Revelation 3:10).

As we move from the letters to the churches in Asia to the next section of the book of Revelation, there is a focus on the foretelling of the future. As the scrolls of Revelation 6 are unfolded one event after another began to unfold. The contents of the scroll predicted wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution and great signs in the sky.

The trumpets of Revelation 8 predicted great devastation on the earth and the unleashing of what is described as locusts and scorpions to inflict pain and harm to its inhabitants. Great bowls of wrath were poured out on the earth in Revelations 16 causing massive damage to the sea, the sky and surface of the earth.

Revelation 13 describes a time of massive persecution under the dominion of two beasts whose control would be felt world-wide. Beyond this, however, John tells of the defeat of a worldview based on the accumulation of riches and pleasure. He speaks of how Satan, sin and death were cast into the pit of hell and assures us that the Lamb of God will have complete victory.

While most of the Revelation 4-22 is a revelation of future events, there are also other prophetic elements evident in this section of John's prophecy. John offers great prophetic encouragement to us in light of the difficult times that are approaching. To those coming out of the great tribulation John said:

*[14] I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

*[15] "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple;*

*and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.*

*[16] They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.*

*[17] For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,*

*and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*

The day is coming when there will no longer be any more hunger or thirst. God will wipe away all tears from our eyes. God is aware of our suffering and pain and will reward all who are faithful in these difficult times.

The picture of heaven in Revelation 21 has been a blessing for countless believers who have stood at the doorsteps of death and eternity. John's description of heaven offers us hope and comfort amid suffering here below. Again, we see the encouragement of God through John's prophetic message in Revelation.

The prophecy of John also warns us and calls us to repentance. Consider his words in Revelation 20:

*[10] and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Revelation 20)*

Consider also his warning in verses 11-15 of the same chapter:

*[12] And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. [13] And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who*

*were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. [14] Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. [15] And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20)*

John tells us that those who were deceived by the devil and followed the beast will be thrown into a lake of fire and tormented day and night. This is a prophetic warning we must take seriously.

Throughout the book, John reflects the heart of God that those who heard his prophecy repent of their sins and turn to the Lord. He reveals to us a Lord who went to extreme measures in calling us to repentance. Throughout the book, John presents the Lord as a Lamb who was slain for our sin (see Revelation 5:6; 5:9; 13:8).

The severe judgements that unfold in the book of Revelation were intended, according to John, to reveal sin and cause human beings to return to God. John describes for us in Revelation 9 a series of plagues that will destroy large parts of the earth and humankind. He concludes the chapter with this word in Revelation 9:20-21:

*[20] The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, [21] nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts. (Revelation 20)*

There is in these words a tone of deep grief and pain. What was intended to warn people and open their hearts to the reality of judgement, did not move them to repentance.

John made a similar statement in Revelation 16 after the Lord sent a scorching heat on the earth:

*[9] They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory. (Revelation 16)*

Notice the connection between the judgement of God in the fierce heat, and the desire of God for repentance.

In his concluding challenge, the apostle hares the words of Jesus who said:

*[12] "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. [13] I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."*

*[14] Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. [15] Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. (Revelation 22)*

Jesus warns those who read this book that He was returning to this earth and when He does, He will come with rewards and punishments in His hands. He will come to judge. Those who have walked in obedience will have the right to the tree of life, but those who refuse Christ and His purpose will be forfeit that eternal blessing. The challenge of John in this prophecy is clear. We must repent and turn to Jesus. Through the prophecies of his book, John is calling humanity to turn to Jesus as their only sure and certain hope.

As we examine the prophecy of John in the book of Revelation, we see how he exposed sin, and evil attitudes. He revealed Jesus as the Lamb who had paid for sin and the

only solution to the problem of evil. He warned about the coming days of persecution and judgement. He also encouraged true believers to persevere as they awaited the final victory that would surely be theirs in the Lord Jesus their Saviour and Lord.

For Consideration:

John's prophecy exposed sin and evil. Give some examples of how the apostle revealed evil and sin in his letters to the churches of Asia.

How important is it that hidden sin is exposed in the church today? Can we truly advance with secret sins in our midst?

How does the prophecy of John bring encouragement to the body of Christ in our day? What is the need in the church for this kind of prophetic encouragement?

John spends a significant amount of time revealing future events in his book. Why do you suppose the Lord wanted to show these events to us?

What warnings do we need to consider from John's prophecy today?

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord for how He has gifted people like John to hear from Him for the encouragement and blessing of the larger body of Christ.

Ask God to reveal the sins that keep you or your church from advancing more fully in your relationship with Him.

Thank the Lord for the encouragement you receive from the book of Revelation, knowing that the Lord Jesus will overcome sin and evil.

Ask God to help you to take the warnings of Revelation seriously. Ask Him to help you to make the best use of the time you have.

Ask God to give you the grace to be a faithful warrior for Him, despite the trials that are ahead for those who belong to Him.

## Chapter 33 - False Prophecy

To say that all prophecy is from God would be foolish. Scripture is clear on this point and speaks quite often about false prophets. These false prophets are in both the Old and the New Testament. We have in 1 Kings 22 the story of how King Ahab of Israel asked King Jehoshaphat of Judah to join forces with him against the Syrians. Before going to battle, however, Jehoshaphat wanted to hear from the Lord. He asked Ahab if there were any prophets he could consult. Ahab brought his prophets before them, and they predicted success in battle. Unconvinced by the prophets of a king who did not serve the Lord, Jehoshaphat asked if there were any prophets of the Lord God. Ahab reluctantly sent for Micaiah.

Listen to what happened when the servants of Ahab went to fetch Micaiah.

*[13] And the messenger who went to summon Micaiah said to him, "Behold, the words of the prophets with one accord are favorable to the king. Let your word be like the word of one of them and speak favorably." (1 Kings 22)*

The messenger sent to bring Micaiah to Jehoshaphat told Micaiah what to say. As a prophet of God, however, Micaiah refused to listen to the words of the messenger, realizing that he had been called to speak not what people wanted him to say but the truth given to him by God.



Micaiah contradicted the prophets who spoke to Ahab and Jehoshaphat said that he saw Israel scattered without a shepherd—an indication that the battle with Syria would take Ahab's life.

What is essential for us to see here is what was expected of the prophets of the day. They were supposed to say what pleased the king or the people who listened to them. They were not hearing from God but spoke what people wanted them to say. They were false prophets.

In the book of Jeremiah, we meet several false prophets. Jeremiah told the people of Judah that the Babylonians were going to take them into captivity and they would remain in exile for seventy years. A prophet by the name of Hannaniah however, contradicted Jeremiah by saying:

*[3] Within two years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the LORD's house, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon. [4] I will also bring back to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and all the exiles from Judah who went to Babylon, declares the LORD, for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon." (Jeremiah 28)*

Those two years would pass, but the prophecy of Hannaniah was not fulfilled. God's people would remain in exile as Jeremiah had prophesied. Hannaniah was a false prophet.

Shemiah the prophet openly contradicted Jeremiah by telling the people of his day that God would break the bondage of Babylon. He encouraged people not to listen to Jeremiah. Listen to what the Lord said to Shemiah because of his rejection of Jeremiah and his message:

*[30] Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: [31] "Send to all the exiles, saying, 'Thus says the LORD*

*concerning Shemaiah of Nehelam: Because Shemaiah had prophesied to you when I did not send him, and has made you trust in a lie, [32] therefore thus says the LORD: Behold, I will punish Shemaiah of Nehelam and his descendants. He shall not have anyone living among this people, and he shall not see the good that I will do to my people, declares the LORD, for he has spoken rebellion against the LORD.”*

According to Jeremiah, Shemaiah was speaking rebellion against the Lord. For this, he would be punished. His descendants would perish. His family line would end.

Jesus warned His listeners about false prophets in His day. Listen to His words in Matthew 7:15:

*[15] “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. (Matthew 7)*

The Lord calls these false prophets, “ravenous wolves.” They disguised themselves as innocent sheep but were in very dangerous.

In Matthew 24 Jesus warns us that as the day of His return draws near, there will be more and more false prophets:

*[11] And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. (Matthew 24)*

The message of these false prophets will be convincing. It will even be backed up by signs and wonders, deceiving many.

*[24] For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. (Matthew 24)*

Some of these false prophets may also be deceiving themselves. Believing themselves to be sincere, they go in the name of Christ, but they do not belong to Him.

*[22] On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' [23] And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' (Matthew 7)*

The people Jesus describes here go out in the name of Jesus and speak in His name. They even do miracles in the name of Jesus, but Jesus has not sent them nor do they represent Him and His purpose. Jesus calls them workers of lawlessness in Matthew 7:22.

The apostle John spoke about a false prophet who will come in the days of the end. Listen to what John saw in his vision in Revelation 16:

*[13] And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. [14] For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. (Revelation 16)*

Notice that out of the mouth of the false prophet came unclean, demonic spirits performing signs and assembling people to fight against the Lord God. Revelation 19:20 reminds us that the destiny of this false prophet is the Lake of fire that burns forever.

There is no question that false prophets existed in Bible times and will continue to exist to the end of days. Accepting the ministry of prophecy brings with it a challenge because not all prophets speak from the Lord.

Speaking through Jeremiah, the Lord told His people:

*[14] Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes,*

*but have seen for you oracles that are false and misleading. (Lamentations 2)*

Ezekiel condemns the prophets of his days who were seeing false visions and deceiving the people:

*[6] They have seen false visions and lying divinations. They say, 'Declares the LORD,' when the LORD has not sent them, and yet they expect him to fulfill their word. [7] Have you not seen a false vision and uttered a lying divination, whenever you have said, 'Declares the LORD,' although I have not spoken?"*

*[8] Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Because you have uttered falsehood and seen lying visions, therefore behold, I am against you, declares the Lord GOD. [9] My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and who give lying divinations. They shall not be in the council of my people, nor be enrolled in the register of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord GOD. (Ezekiel 13)*

These prophets spoke when God had not sent them. God stood against them and would punish them for pretending to represent Him and His purpose. They were impostors speaking what they wanted the people to hear and using God's name as their authority.

Because false prophets speak what people want to hear, they are popular. Listen to the words of Jesus in Luke 6:

*[26] "Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets. (Luke 6)*

The prophet Micah reflects the heart of the people of his day when he said:

*[11] If a man should go about and utter wind and lies, saying, "I will preach to you of wine and strong drink," he would be the preacher for this people! (Micah 2)*

Where there are people who want to justify their sinful lifestyle, there will always be prophets to comfort and reassure them in that lifestyle. Be assured, however, that these prophets do not come from God. Jeremiah said this about these false prophets:

*[14] And the LORD said to me: "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds. (Jeremiah 14)*

The apostle Peter challenges us to be aware of the danger of false prophets in the church today.

*[2:1] But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. [2] And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. [3] And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. (2 Peter 2)*

Peter prophesied that there would be false teachers and false prophets would rise up secretly in the church. These false teachers and prophets will introduce heresies into the church. They would even encourage the pursuit of fleshly desires. The result of this would be that the name of the Lord would be blasphemed.

How careful we need to be in our day! Scripture warns that there will be false prophets seeking to dilute the truth and introduce false teaching into the church. It is for this reason that the apostle John tells us in 1 John 4:

*[4:1] Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1 John 4)*

Notice that John tells us that because there are *many* false prophets in the world, we need to be careful to subject every prophecy to a test to see if it is really from God. How are we to test what we hear? How can we know if a prophet is from God? Scripture provides the answer for us so that we can discern true prophecy from false.

## RECOGNIZING TRUE PROPHECY

In Deuteronomy 18 the Lord underlined the seriousness of speaking as a prophet in His name.

*[20] But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.' (Deuteronomy 18)*

To speak a word in God's name that He did not give, was an offense worthy of death. This statement brings up an important question:

*[21] And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?'— (Deuteronomy 18)*

How can we tell if the word that the prophet speaks is from God and not the invention of his or her thoughts and imaginations? The Lord taught His people in verse 22 that the word of a true prophet will come to pass.

*[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; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him. (Deuteronomy 18)*

The first simple test of a true prophet, according to Deuteronomy 18 is in the fulfilment of the word spoken. If I say something is going to happen and it does not happen, then I am lying.

Fulfilment of a prophecy, however, is not the only test of a true prophet. Listen to the words of Deuteronomy 13:1-5:

*[13:1] "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, [2] and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,' [3] you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deuteronomy 13)*

In this illustration, the prophet performs a miraculous sign before the people, and while the sign came to pass, the prophet then called people to worship other gods. The Lord told His people that they were not to listen to this prophet for he or she was a false prophet. True prophecy will always be in harmony with the character of God and His established purposes. When we hear a prophet telling us to do something that is contrary to the revealed will and heart of God, we know that even though that prophet performs signs and wonders that come to pass, he or she is not from God.

Jeremiah tells us something more about the character of a false prophet. In Jeremiah 23 he writes:

*[13] In the prophets of Samaria I saw an unsavoury thing: they prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray. [14] But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his evil; all of them have become like Sodom to me,*

*and its inhabitants like Gomorrah.” [15] Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets: “Behold, I will feed them with bitter food and give them poisoned water to drink, for from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has gone out into all the land.” (Jeremiah 23)*

The prophets of Israel “prophesied by Baal” (verse 13). A true prophet of God will not draw his or her prophecies from the well of pagan religions or secular thought. If a prophet finds his or her source in pagan religions or worldly ways, that the prophet is not speaking from God. All true prophets of God are inspired by God and speak only what He gives them. They will not draw their inspiration from other sources.

Jeremiah goes on in chapter 13 to tell us that the prophets of Israel committed adultery, walked in lies and strengthened the hand of evildoers (verse 14). You can distinguish a true prophet by how he or she lives. A genuine servant of God will not speak one word and live another. We must examine the life of a prophet to see whether they walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. A prophet who does not live a life that is in tune with God and His purpose is to be regarded with suspicion.

Jesus said something very similar in Matthew 7 when He said:

*[15] “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. [16] You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? [17] So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. [18] A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. [19] Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. [20] Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. (Matthew 7)*



Jesus warned His listeners not to be deceived by “ravenous wolves” (false prophets) who come to them dressed in sheep’s clothing. He told them that they would be able to recognize them by their fruit (verse 16). If a fruit tree is healthy, it will bear good fruit. A prophet who is sincere will live a life that is godly. If the lives of the prophets speaking did not conform to the purpose of God, they were to be rejected as false prophets.

Peter describes false prophets and teachers in 2 Peter 2:

*[2:1] But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. [2] And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. [3] And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. (2 Peter 2)*

Peter tells us that false prophets and teachers “bring in destructive heresies.” In other words, they teach doctrines that are contrary to the principles taught in the Word of God. Prophecy is always in subjection to the truth of the Bible. Any prophecy that is not in full agreement with the teaching of Scripture must be rejected.

Notice also that the false prophets Peter speaks about here “follow their sensuality.” They are filled with lust and greed. Peter tells us that they exploit people because of their greed (verse 3). Their concern is for themselves, their pleasures and their profit. Any prophet who is more concerned about their profit than the truth of God, must be considered false.

The apostle John concludes his prophesy with the following words:

*[18] I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, [19] and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. (Revelation 22)*

Notice that John tells us that no one has the freedom to add or take away from the prophecy he spoke. The implication is that if a prophet speaks a word that is adding to or taking away from the instruction of God's Word, that prophet is false. Again, all prophecy is to be in submission to the inspired Word of God which will never change.

## PROPHECY AND SORCERY

The Lord God is the source of all true prophecy. While this should go without saying, there are many passages in Scripture that show that not all prophets who speak in the name of God receive their messages from God. We can be sure that Satan is busy seeking to counterfeit the truth and deceive the people of God. The Lord God challenged His people as they prepared to enter the Land of Promise with the following words:

*[13] You shall be blameless before the LORD your God, [14] for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do this. (Deuteronomy 18)*

Through Moses, the Lord reminded His people that the nations he was driving out of the land before them, consulted fortune-tellers and diviners. He warned them not to seek counsel from these people. They were to seek Him alone.

They were not to allow anyone who practiced these arts to live among them:

*[10] There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer [11] or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead (Deuteronomy 18)*

Though they were warned about the practices of divination, sorcery and fortune telling, the people of God would quickly fall into this trap. 2 Kings 17:17 describes the people of God in the northern Kingdom of Israel:

*[17] And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings and used divination and omens and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger. [18] Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight. None was left but the tribe of Judah only.*

Notice how the people of God practiced divination. This was not just the sin of the people but the prophets as well:

*[11] 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." (Micah 3)*

Micah condemns the prophets for practicing divination for money. They were finding their messages in these magic arts and not from the Lord.

When Paul and Silas were in Philippi, they met a slave girl who had a spirit of divination. Her owners used her as a fortune-teller and made much money as a result.

*[16] As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and*

*brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. (Acts 16)*

Notice the message this young fortune teller spoke:

*[17] She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." (Acts 16)*

Consider these words. The young girl told everyone that Paul and Silas were servants of God and had come to tell them the way of salvation. This message was true. Notice, however, the response of Paul to this young girl in Acts 16:18:

*[18] And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. (Acts 16)*

Paul became very annoyed and commanded the spirit of divination to come out of her. The declaration of this young woman was correct, but it came from an evil spirit of divination. Because this message came from an evil spirit, Paul had to deal with the woman and cast out this spirit.

We learn from this passage that Satan can use people to speak and predict the future. Here was a woman who told fortunes. Likely many of those fortunes came true, but the source of this information was not God. Believers should not be deceived into thinking that because something comes to pass it must be from God. They must also be careful not to turn to or trust any other source of prophetic insight apart from God and His Word.

Listen to the words of Peter regarding the message of the apostles:

*[16] For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord*

*Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. [17] For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," [18] we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. [19] And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, [20] knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. [21] For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1)*

Peter assures us the apostles were eyewitnesses and heard the "voice borne from heaven." Their prophetic message was "fully confirmed" because it was not of their own interpretation but "spoke from God" as they were "carried along by the Spirit." There can be no question as to the source of Peter's prophecy—God was His source.

The distinction between true Biblical prophecy and fortune-telling or divination is the source of the message. Fortune-tellers or diviners conjure up spirits to give insight and understanding, but Scripture forbids co-operation with demonic beings and relying on them to guide and show us the path we must take. For the believer, our source is God and His Word. We must not be deceived by the spirit of divination even when it speaks the truth and performs great signs and wonders.

Is it possible that many who claim to be prophets of God are being empowered by a spirit of divination? Do they speak truth from this spirit? Do they receive their power from this spirit? We need to be careful lest we are deceived.

The apostle John warns us that the day is coming when a great beast will arise to deceive the world. Listen to his description of this beast in Revelation 13:

*[11] Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. [12] It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. [13] It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, [14] and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. [15] And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. [16] Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, [17] so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. [18] This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666. (Revelation 13)*

The beast John describes here looked like a lamb but spoke like a dragon (verse 11). It performed many signs (verse 12). It made the people of the earth worship the first beast (verse 12). Its power and authority were great, and no one could buy or sell unless they received his mark as a sign of allegiance (verse 17). The mighty beast was demonic and fought against the purpose of God. His miraculous signs and wonders were from hell, yet he deceived many.

## PUNISHMENT FOR FALSE PROPHECY

Let me conclude with a brief review of what Scripture teaches about the destiny of false prophets. Moses told his people what they were to do with anyone who sought to take their people away from true God:

*[6] "If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or the wife you embrace or your friend who is as your own soul entices you secretly, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which neither you nor your fathers have known, [7] some of the gods of the peoples who are around you, whether near you or far off from you, from the one end of the earth to the other, [8] you shall not yield to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him, nor shall you conceal him. [9] But you shall kill him. Your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. [10] You shall stone him to death with stones, because he sought to draw you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. [11] And all Israel shall hear and fear and never again do any such wickedness as this among you. (Deuteronomy 13)*

There was to be no pity on anyone who prophesied and sought to lead people astray –these individuals were stoned to death and their wickedness removed from the land. Deuteronomy 18:20 tells us that any prophet who presumed to speak from God when the Lord did not send him was to be killed:

*[20] But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.' (Deuteronomy 18)*

Revelation 19:20 describes the destiny of the false prophet who will come in the last days:

*[20] And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. (Revelation 19)*

The Lake of Fire was the destiny of the false prophet of Revelation. He will be cast into this lake along with all who were deceived by him. Speaking about false prophets and teachers in 2 Peter 2:1-4, the apostle tells us that their destruction is “not asleep.” In other words, their judgement was coming. God reserved a severe punishment for false prophets and teachers.

Scripture assumes that the ministry of prophecy is ongoing. It also warns us that there will be many counterfeit and false prophets who seek to infiltrate the church and deceive the people of God. For this reason, the New Testament takes the time to instruct believers in how to discern a true prophet from a false prophet. Not all who claim to speak from God belong to Him.

For Consideration:

Give some examples of false prophets in the Bible.

Do false prophets exist today? How do you know they are false?

What is the difference between sorcery or fortune-telling and Biblical prophecy?



Why must we reject a false prophet even when he or she speaks the truth in a given situation and confirm it with a sign?

Take a moment to examine those who claim to be prophets in our day. Do they demonstrate the characteristics of a true prophet of God?

For Prayer:

Thank God for those who stand firm on the truth of God's Word in our day.

Ask God to give your church great discernment to distinguish true from false prophecy.

Ask the Lord to open the eyes of those who have been deceived by false prophets. Pray that they would come to the truth and resist the lies they have been led to believe.

## Chapter 34 - Biblical Arguments Used Against the Prophetic Ministry Today

We have examined a variety of verses in both the Old and the New Testament relating to the prophetic ministry. In the New Testament, we saw how the apostles not only taught about prophecy in the church but encouraged believers to prophesy (see 1 Corinthians 14:1). Not all churches, however, believe that the prophetic ministry is for the church in our day. There are a variety of arguments used to support this position. Let me take a moment to consider these arguments.

### The Bible is Complete –no further revelation needed

Those who reject the prophetic ministry for today stand firmly on the authority of the Word of God as our only true and complete revelation of God and His purpose. They teach that no further revelation is needed. The Bible, as we have it, is God's complete revelation of Himself and His purpose and nothing more can be added to it. There is a feeling that if God continues to reveal Himself and His purpose through prophets today than this undermines the completeness of God's Word and its sufficiency to tell all we need to know about God. For these individuals, there is no need for prophecy today because we have the Word of God which teaches us all we need to know. This Word has answers to all the questions we will ever have. If we

would study and apply the truth of this Word, there would be no need for a prophetic ministry.

There is no question that the Bible, as we have it today, is complete. It does have the answers we need and is our guide in all matters pertaining to life and faith. Every believer must walk in complete and total obedience to this Word.

While God has given us His Word as our guide, He has also given spiritual gifts to the church. For example, God has given teachers to help believers understand the truth He has given in His Word. He has given us pastors to help us apply the truth to our daily life. He has given us evangelists to take the message of salvation found in the Word to the masses who do not know the Saviour.

The prophet who taught or encouraged anything that was contrary to the Scriptures was a false prophet. True prophecy will never add to or take away from the Word of God. The Word judges its genuineness. Prophets in the Bible were held accountable to the written Word—not only regarding what they spoke but also in how they lived.

What is the nature of true prophecy? True prophecy reveals the God found in Scripture. It speaks to our shortcomings and failures to comply with His standards. It encourages us in the work we have been called to do by the God of Scripture and shows us how to apply the truth of Scripture to our walk with Him. It strengthens, encourages and comforts us as we seek to live in the purpose of Scripture.

If you find a prophet who is seeking to add to the Scriptures or take away from the Scriptures than that prophet is a false prophet. If that prophet is encouraging the church to do what is contrary to the teaching of the Bible, he or she must be rejected and disciplined. If a prophet is not living in submission to the principles taught in the Scripture, that

prophet's message in to be regarded with deep suspicion. Prophecy is not designed to add anything to the Word of God but to encourage believers as they seek to live in tune with that Word.

### *The Possibility of False Prophets*

Prophecy is not without its difficulty for the church. The potential for false prophecy has always been real. This is why the New Testament encourages the testing of all prophecies to be sure they are from God and in tune with the teaching of the Bible. In 1 Thessalonians 5, the apostle Paul wrote:

*[19] Do not quench the Spirit. [20] Do not despise prophecies, [21] but test everything; hold fast what is good. (1 Thessalonians 5)*

There is a connection in this verse between quenching the Spirit and despising prophecies. The idea is that the Spirit of God wanted to convey His purpose, but the church in Thessalonica was rejecting the prophetic ministry. Instead of dismissing what the Spirit was saying through these prophets, Paul challenged the Thessalonians to test each prophecy and to hold fast to what was from God.

It was not just prophecy that caused difficulties for the early church. They also had to deal with evangelists who were passing through the region teaching that to be a believer one needed to be circumcised and follow the Jewish law. Paul speaks very sharply against these evangelists:

*[6] I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— [7] not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the*

*gospel of Christ. [8] But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. [9] As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1)*

The church in Galatian had to deal with "false evangelists." They submitted their message to the microscope of God's Word and found that what they preached was not in line with what the apostles taught. They fought false evangelists with the truth of God's Word. They accepted those who spoke the truth and rejected those who sought to divert people from the genuine gospel.

False evangelists were not the only problem for the early church. Listen to the words of Paul to Timothy:

*[3] As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, [4] nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. (1 Timothy 1)*

Paul urged Timothy to charge certain teachers not to teach a doctrine that was contrary to what had been handed down to them by the apostles. These teachers devoted themselves to myths, genealogies and speculations. They were not, however, communicating the truth of God's Word.

In his letter, Jude writes:

*[3] Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. [4] For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this*

*condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. (Jude)*

Jude told his readers that they were to “contend” for the faith that was “delivered to the saints.” He reminded them that individuals who had crept into their midst who were perverting the truth they had heard and not walking in a way that pleased the Lord God.

Whether it be prophecy, teaching or sharing the gospel, the possibility exists that there will be those who present a wrong message. We need to be prepared for this. The way to deal with this problem, however, is not to reject all teaching, evangelism and prophecy, but to subject them all to the examination of the authoritative word of God. Whatever does not pass the test of conformity to that Word must be corrected or rejected entirely.

God has given gifts to the church for its edification and encouragement. We cannot reject these gifts, but we must be ever watchful that these gifts do not wander from the truth. To despise what God has given is to grieve the Holy Spirit who wants to use these gifts for the building up of the body.

### *Biblical Arguments*

#### 1 Corinthians 13

Finally, I would like to address two key passages that are used today to teach that the prophetic ministry has ceased. The first of these passages is 1 Corinthians 13:8-12:

*[8] Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. [9] For we know in part and we prophesy in part, [10] but when the perfect comes, the partial will*

*pass away. [11] When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. [12] For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. (1 Corinthians 13)*

Notice what Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 13:8 – “As for prophecies, they will pass away.” The apostle Paul told the Corinthians that there would be a time when prophecy will cease. What he told them about prophecy he also said about the gift of tongues and the gift of knowledge. Tongues will stop, and knowledge will pass away (verse 8).

The question we need to ask ourselves is this: When will these gifts cease and be no longer necessary? Paul goes on to answer this question in verse 10 when he says: “when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.” These gifts will no longer be necessary when the “perfect comes.” What are we to understand by the word “perfect?”

Some understand that the word perfect refers to the Lord Jesus or the Holy Spirit. The problem with this is that the Lord Jesus had already come when Paul wrote this to the Corinthians. The Holy Spirit had already fallen on believers in Acts 2. Even after the coming of the Lord, and the Holy Spirit, the apostles continued to encourage the use of prophecy and the gift of tongues. While the Lord Jesus is perfect, it seems clear that Paul is not speaking about the first coming of the Lord Jesus or the Holy Spirit in this passage.

Others have understood the word “perfect” to refer to the Bible as a perfect and complete revelation of God. They believe that ever since we have the entire Bible than these gifts have ceased as they are no more necessary. Again, there is an element of truth in this. The Word of God does

provide us with the answers we need for our life and faith. The problem with this interpretation, however, comes in the remainder of what Paul goes on to say.

*[12] For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. (1 Corinthians 13)*

Paul speaks here of a time when the perfect comes, and we see face to face and know as we are known. There is no question that the Bible reveals the Lord Jesus to us, and we come to know Him more and more as we read the pages of His Word. As much as I seek the Lord through the Word, however, I come up short of knowing Him fully. As much as I encounter Him in the truth revealed I cannot say that I have seen Him face to face. I have grown in my knowledge of God through the Word, but I cannot say that I know Him as he knows me.

The word "perfect" here is described as a time when I will see Christ face to face and know Him as he knows me. As we walk with Him in eternity, we will know him just as He knows us. On this earth, we will always fall short of this. We look forward to a day when sin is destroyed, and the perfect is restored. There in heaven, I shall see my Saviour and know Him as I have never known him on this earth. There in heaven, I will no longer need to hear Him through hidden prophetic messages or commune with him in unknown languages. There I shall no longer need anyone to teach me about him for I will know Him just like He knows me.

It seems logical to assume, therefore, that Paul is telling us that when we get to heaven, these spiritual gifts will no longer be necessary. Prophecy will cease because we will be in direct communion with the Lord. Knowledge or the teaching of knowledge will end because we will know God and His purposes. As long as we live in this imperfect



world, we will need the gifts that God has given to the church. Those gifts include prophecy and the teaching of knowledge.

## Hebrews 1

The second passage used by those who believe that prophecy is no longer for today is in Hebrews 1:

*[1] Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (Hebrews 1)*

The writer of Hebrews seems to speak of two periods of history. The first was “long ago” when God spoke to His people through prophets. The second is in “these days” when God speaks through His Son. The writer to the Hebrews continues in the book to speak about how Christ is greater than the angels, Moses and the priests of the Old Testament. The covenant He made was greater than the covenant made through Moses. His sacrifice completely cleansed us from sin in a way that all the sacrifices of the Old Testament failed to do. The author then concludes his book with these two statements:

*[17] Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Hebrews 13)*

*[22] I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. (Hebrews 13)*

Because God speaks to us through His Son, we are to obey our leaders and bear with the “word of exhortation.”

In the Old Testament ("long ago") the God spoke to His people revealing that the Saviour would come. In the New Testament, however, the Lord Jesus fulfilled that prophecy and came to this earth to be a sacrifice for our sin. He speaks to us by His life. He points us to His Word. He places His Holy Spirit in us to enable us to walk in obedience. According to Hebrews 13:17, 22 He also speaks to us through the gifts He gives the church and the exhortations He brings through His servants.

If God speaks to us through Christ now, do we have any need of the Holy Spirit? If God's revelation of Himself is through Christ, do we need to study the Word of God? If God uses Christ to show His purpose is there any use for the gifts He gives to the church? The context reveals that because Christ has come as the fulfilment of prophecy, we need to be more diligent in obeying the leaders He has given us to guard us in our relationship with Him. We are also to listen to the word of exhortation brought by the servants He sends. Hebrews 1 does not remove our obligation to submit to the authority of the church, its leadership, or to obedience to the prophetic voices He sends. If anything, it challenges us to be even more diligent in listening so that we can grow to know Him even more.

For Consideration:

Does true prophecy add or take away from the Bible? How should you respond to any prophet who presents a message that is contrary to the principles of God's Word?

How do we deal with false teaching or false prophecy? Is rejecting prophecy or teaching because there may be false teachers and prophets the answer? Why or why not?

Will prophecy always be necessary? Why is it necessary today?

If God reveals Himself through Christ, why is evangelism, teaching or prophecy necessary?

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to give you discernment as a church to distinguish falsehood from truth. Ask God to provide you with a deeper knowledge of His Word so that you can receive what is from Him and reject what is not.

Thank the Lord that the day is coming when we will know Him and hear from Him directly. Thank Him that in the meantime, we have men and women gifted to teach and exhort us on His behalf.

## Chapter 35 - Prophecy in the Church Today

In this study, we have examined the teaching of both the Old and the New Testament about the ministry of prophecy. We discussed objections to the ministry in the modern church. If prophecy is an ongoing ministry and gift for the church today, what should it look like and how do we use it? I will attempt to close this study with some answers to this question.

Let me begin by saying that the question of what the ministry of prophecy should look like today is not easy to answer. Consider the prophets we have studied. Each one exercised his or her gift differently. Each prophet had a message or burden that was unique to them. How they received their words was also different. We must understand that this will be true in the church of our day as well.

To answer the question, however, we must go back to the Scriptures to see what the prophetic ministry looked like in the time when the Bible was being written. As we look at the ministry of the prophet in the Bible, we get a better understanding of what it should look like today.

### *Preparation and Direction for what God has in Store*

As I look back on my preaching and teaching ministry, I have become aware that the ministry is not just a ministry of teaching the Word, but it also has a prophetic side to it.

If a pastor is in tune with the Lord, the Lord will give him messages and help him apply that truth to real life situations. The Lord will speak through the pastor to the congregation, preparing them for His purposes and helping them to make the right decisions. The pastor may not always understand this. I have had times when people came up to me after speaking and said, "Wayne, you have no way of knowing how that message answered a particular need. The Lord used you to speak to a situation I was going through. Now I know what I need to do."

It is not just the pastor who has a prophetic ministry. There have been times when the Lord has used individuals to share His heart for the church. Maybe you have had a time where someone shared a burden for a ministry in the community. The Lord seemed to speak through this to the church and used that challenge to direct it into a whole new ministry focus. The Lord leads His people through those who speak what He puts on their heart.

### *Speaking Directly to our Need*

Maybe you come to church with a burden on your heart. You don't know what to do with that burden, and your heart is weighted down. The pastor begins to speak, and you sense that he is addressing the very need of your heart—it is as if God Himself was talking to you through the word preached from the pulpit.

Maybe that encouragement comes in the form of a conversation with a fellow believer. That conversation was from the Lord. Your friend speaks right to your heart, and again you feel that all this was from God who knew your need.

*Rebuke*

Sometimes the church falls into error or apathy. Members of the church may not even aware of this. The Lord may bring someone to speak to this issue. By this means the Lord opens the eyes of the church to false motivations, wrong attitudes, or sinful behaviour.

It is so easy for us to fall into a rut and content ourselves with our routine. The prophet stirs us up to leave our comfort zones and challenges our apathy or proud spirit.

How blind we are to our own errors and faults! How we need men and women in our day, who will challenge us with the heart of God. Those who are not afraid to lovingly speak the rebuke of God so that we can again find the path He has laid out for us.

*Example for us to follow*

Not every prophet speaks with words. The Lord called His servants also to live out the message by their lifestyle. Throughout the history of the church, God has called individuals to live a lifestyle that speaks powerfully to the church of the day. Some have sacrificed all they had to lay their lives down on the mission field. Others have offered time and effort to serve the Lord in prayer or social outreach. These individuals are not "ordinary" individuals. They are seen as extreme or excessive in their devotion, but they are being used by the Lord to challenge the church of our day to consider its priorities and ministries.

*Insight into the purpose of the Lord*

There are times in the life of the church when it appears that growth has stopped and there no longer any blessing or fruit. What is true of our life as a church is also true in

our personal lives. Sometimes we face moments when we feel like everything is going wrong and we don't know what to do or what direction to take. We wonder why we are experiencing so many difficulties.

Sometimes, the Lord brings His servants into our situations to reveal His purpose and expose what He is doing. These prophets show us the lessons God is teaching us and encourage us to learn these lessons. They show us that God has a purpose in our pain or barrenness. They remind us that God is using what we are facing to purify our hearts and lives. Sometimes the lessons they show us are not ones we are willing to learn. God gives insight through His servants so that we can learn and more fully grow in His purpose.

### *Application of Scripture*

Prophecy is subject to the Scriptures, and the true prophet will never prophecy anything that is contrary to the principles taught in the Bible. I remember speaking to a pastor friend of mine some time ago about a book he had read. He told me that that book spoke directly to him in his need. The book was a book I had written expounding the truth of Scripture. The Lord took the teaching of the word and practically applied it to the life of that pastor in a time of need. There is a prophetic dimension to this.

I have sat under the preaching of the word of God and heard it explained to me in such a way that it went beyond teaching. Suddenly, I saw the truth and the application of that truth in a new way. It was as if the Lord, Himself was opening the Scriptures to me. God will empower His servants to open His word in such a way that it powerfully communicates His heart and will to us personally.

*Pointing us to God*

The prophets of both the Old and New Testament led people to God. They often spoke about His character and attributes. They spoke of Him as a jealous and loving God who would not share His glory or His people with another. They spoke of Him also as a righteous and just God who would bring the sinner to judgement. It is the heart of God to reveal Himself to us. It is the heart of prophecy to reveal God.

This revelation of God strengthens, encourages, warns and challenges us. In our time of trouble, it comforts us. In our time of wandering, it draws us back. Some of the most powerful prophets of our day are musicians. There is often a connection between music and prophecy in Scripture. Through hymns and spiritual songs, these musical prophets remind us of who God is. They inspire and urge us to walk worthy of His name.

*Practical Demonstration of the Power of God*

The ministry of the prophet can be a powerful demonstration of the power and character of God. Sometimes God will reveal things to the prophet that no one else knows. The prophet of God then speaks to the person concerned about this matter. Not only does this bring personal rebuke but it can also bring tremendous encouragement. I remember being in a meeting many years ago where an individual was speaking and said that he felt that there were individuals present to whom God had given a ministry of writing. That word spoke directly to me. There was no laying on of hands or prayer, but even years later I believe that God was talking to me and encouraging me in this ministry. I have watched this unfold in my life. Sometimes God reveals things through His servants that no one else knows



about. He shows Himself as an all-knowing and all-powerful God through His servants.

### *A Revelation of the tactics of the enemy*

Just as the Lord God exposed the attitude of Ananias and Sapphira to Peter, so He will reveal the tactics of the enemy to disrupt and confuse the church. The Lord will sometimes give His prophets insight into the techniques being used by the enemy to hinder the work of His kingdom. This enables us to focus our prayers and efforts in a way that is most effective in dealing with the attack of Satan.

I remember a time in my life when I felt like I was in a great spiritual battle. I saw myself blindfold with a sword in my hand. I swung that sword in every direction possible hoping that I would somehow strike the enemy. I remember feeling hopeless and fearful because, blindfolded, I could not see where I was swinging my sword. I sensed my blindness in a powerful way. I thought of how much better it would be to be able to focus my attention on enemies I could see rather than wearing myself out trying to strike enemies I could not see.

We need eyes to see the enemy before us. We need discernment to know what enemies we need to fight. God does not leave us blind. Sometimes He gives us the insight to acknowledge the presence these enemies. Sometimes He gives sight to His prophets and challenges them to speak to us about the tactic of the enemy. The Lord may give you insight into the struggle of a brother or sister that they cannot see. He has made us dependant on each other.

We have spoken so far about what the prophetic ministry could look like in the church of our day. The question we

need to address now is whether our church is setup to allow this kind of ministry to thrive. As a church, we have recognized the significance of the teaching ministry. We have Bible studies and preaching times where the focus is on teaching. We also understand the importance of evangelism and encourage our members to share their faith.

The question we need to address here briefly is whether the prophetic ministry deserves attention in our worship services and life as a church. Where does the person who feels he or she has a prophetic word to share use this gift?

First, the prophet may use his gift through the preaching of the Word of God. The Lord has often chosen to speak through His servants in the church through the sermon. Here the prophet can not only open the Word of God but share the heart of God in that Word. He can challenge the church and bring words of comfort and warning from God through the preaching of the Word.

Second, the prophet can make use of his or her gift through private conversations with people in the body of Christ. This means that the church needs to provide opportunities for believers to get together informally to interact. In the church where I attend, we have lunch after the worship service where everyone present can have a chance to share informally together. I have often had times to interact with believers and unbelievers in these times.

Sometimes the Lord gives us a word not for an individual but the larger body. The church in Corinth gave time for believers to share publicly in the service of worship. There is value to allowing people to share publicly what God has been doing and what God has put on their heart. This gives the Lord the opportunity to use His people to communicate encouragement and challenge from Him.

Prophets can also communicate what God has put on their heart through the ministry of writing. Maybe you have read

a book that has spoken directly to your need and revealed a particular sin in your life. That book may have unlocked an attitude that was keeping you from growing in the Lord. Books are not the only way prophets can communicate. Hymns and spiritual songs are also a means of sharing what God has put on our heart for the church. Many prophetic words are written in the form of poetry. A quick look at the prophecies of the Old Testament shows that many were written in this way. These songs, poems or prose can be shared with the larger body as a means of conveying the heart of God.

We need to recognize that the Lord wants to use our brothers and sisters to speak to us and challenge us in our spiritual walk. Not everyone who speaks prophetically is called to the office of a prophet. There are people God has gifted as evangelists, pastors and teachers. This does not mean, however, that those of us who are not gifted in this way do not need to share our faith. Even those who are not gifted teachers can teach someone else. I may not be gifted as an encourager, but there are times when I encourage. What is true for these gifts is true for prophecy as well. I may not feel that I hear from the Lord, but there are times when God will use me to convey His heart to another person. There are times when the Lord will give me words to speak.

It is for this reason that all of us need to be open to the Lord and His leading. He may challenge me to speak to another person and communicate His heart. I don't have to be a prophet to speak what He has given me. I can speak prophetically without being called to the office of a prophet. What I am describing here is a ministry in the church where even the simplest believer can share the heart of God.

Let me share a word about our modern day "prophetic meetings." I have been in a number of meetings where

someone who appeared to have a prophetic gifting has spoken. These meetings seem to draw a crowd. People come from great distances to get a word from the Lord. This is not new. People in Bible times did the same thing.

The people gathered in the meeting are amazed at the gifting of the prophet who sometimes walks through the crowd with a microphone in hand sharing publicly what God has given them for various individuals.

It is not my intention to judge the method used here. What I do want to speak about, however, is that there is a hunger in the heart of God's people to hear from Him. If the local church is not allowing for the Lord to speak to their members through each other than God's people will seek to hear from Him in other ways. The attraction to large prophetic meetings may be because needs are not being addressed in local settings.

The other detail I want to bring to our attention is the need for us to be careful not to elevate the prophet above God. There can be a tendency for those who prophecy to draw attention to themselves and not to the Lord. People can be so impressed with the gift of the prophet that they do not see the Lord. It is easy for the prophet to take attention away from the Lord and place that attention on themselves. While this can still be a temptation in the local church, it is moderated by the fact the people know us and can keep our pride in check.

Some individuals have become so addicted to prophetic words that they seem to be unable to discern the will of the Lord personally. I have known individuals who rarely read their Bible but crave a prophetic word. Rather than going to the Lord and seeking His will through His Word and the godly counsel of their church leaders, these individuals continuously seek out the word of a prophet. They become dependent on those they perceive to have a prophetic

gifting. This is not helpful in the end. We must all seek to know God and His purpose as revealed through His Word. The ministry of a prophet is no substitute for the study of God's word and regular fellowship with His people.

Does God speak today? From what we have studied it seems obvious that He does. He has called us to share the message of salvation with the world. He has called us to teach and disciple those who come to Him. He has called us to share words of encouragement, insight, and warning. Sometimes we think of prophets as special people who have a special relationship and walk with God that we could never have. The reality of the matter, however, is that God wants to use each of us to communicate His will and purpose. Prophecy is simply sharing what God puts on our heart to share. That may be a word of encouragement and comfort to a person in need. It may be a strong warning to someone wandering from the truth. Will you share what He gives you to share? Will you take the words and burdens He gives and bring them to those for whom they are intended? Will you boldly and lovingly speak what God puts on your heart for the strengthening, encouragement and comfort of the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 14:3)?

For Consideration:

Have you ever read a book, listened to a message or had a song speak directly to a need in your life? Could you say that God spoke to you through this medium?

Have you ever felt a burden on your heart to speak a word of encouragement or challenge to another person? Could

it be that the Lord has been giving you a message for them?

How does prophecy demonstrate the power and presence of God?

Can prophecy help us to understand the tactics of the enemy?

Is your church set up in a way that enables the Lord to use your brothers and sisters to speak to each other in the name of the Lord?

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord for the way He has led individuals to speak to you and challenge you in your spiritual walk.

Ask the Lord to help your church to understand that God still wants to use us to be instruments of His care and concern. Pray that the Lord would make you a faithful messenger.

Ask God to reveal to you and your church how you can be aware of the tactics of the enemy and his efforts to distract you. Thank the Lord that He is willing to reveal these things to us so that we can grow in our faith and intimacy with Him.

## Light To My Path Book Distribution

Light To My Path (LTMP) is a book writing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their ministries and personal encouragement. F. Wayne Mac Leod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing these books with a goal to distribute them to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

To date, tens of thousands of books are being used in preaching, teaching, evangelism and encouragement of local believers in over sixty countries. Books have now been translated several languages. The goal is to make them available to as many believers as possible.

The ministry of LTMP is a faith-based ministry, and we trust the Lord for the resources necessary to distribute the books for the encouragement and strengthening of believers around the world. Would you pray that the Lord would open doors for the translation and further distribution of these books?

For more information about Light To My Path Book Distribution visit our website at [ltmp-homepage.blogspot.ca](http://ltmp-homepage.blogspot.ca)