COGMA

Church of God Mission Academy

STUDY GUIDE 8

Understanding *the* Bible

STUDY GUIDE 5 OF 8:

The Prophets — Warning, Promise and Hope

An overview of God's messengers calling people back.



Equipping and empowering for effective service

2 Timothy 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

> *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

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- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

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PREFACE

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The previous Study Guide examined the Books of Wisdom and Poetry and showed how Scripture speaks into the deepest experiences of human life. We now move into the final major division of the Old Testament: the Prophetic Books, where God repeatedly spoke to His people through men whom He called for particular times, places and circumstances.

The prophets were more than predictors of future events. They were God's messengers, declaring His Word to people who often needed warning, correction, encouragement or hope. They exposed sin, called people to repentance, warned of approaching judgement and reminded God's people that His purpose would not end with their failure.

The Prophetic Books are commonly divided into the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets. These titles do not describe importance, but mainly the length of the books. Together they form the final seventeen books of the Old Testament, although the prophets themselves ministered across different periods of Israel's history.

Some prophets spoke before the captivities, others during the exile, and others after the return to Jerusalem. Their books are therefore not arranged in strict chronological order. Understanding their historical setting will help us understand why particular messages were given.

Yet a common thread runs through them all. The prophets warned of judgement, called for repentance, promised restoration and repeatedly pointed forward to the coming Messiah. Isaiah spoke of the coming Christ, Jeremiah of the New Covenant, Ezekiel of a new heart and spirit, Daniel of God's unfolding purpose, and the Minor Prophets continued the testimony.

Most importantly, the prophetic message leads us to Jesus Christ. Moses foretold the coming Prophet, and the New Testament identifies that Prophet as Jesus.

As we study these books, we will therefore consider both their immediate message and their greater purpose in directing us towards the fulfilment of God's purpose in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did the prophets speak to their own people and also point towards Christ?

Personal Reflection

Have you listened for both warning and hope when reading a prophet?

Action Step

Choose a prophecy with both warning and hope. Which part challenges your present attitude, and how should you respond?

INTRODUCTION: GOD SPOKE THROUGH HIS PROPHETS

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Throughout the Old Testament, God called individuals to speak His Word to particular people in particular circumstances. These men were known as prophets, and their ministry became

especially important when God's people were drifting into sin, idolatry, injustice or disobedience.

A prophet was more than someone who predicted future events. He was a messenger who spoke on behalf of God. The prophet received a message from God and was responsible to communicate that message faithfully, whether the people welcomed it or rejected it.

This principle can be seen in **2 Kings 24:2**:

> *"And the LORD sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servants the prophets."*

Notice the expression: *"the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servants the prophets."*

The message ultimately belonged to God. The prophets were His servants through whom that message was delivered.

Prophets Were Watchmen

The prophets were sometimes described as watchmen because they warned God's people of approaching spiritual and physical danger.

God said to Ezekiel in **Ezekiel 3:17**:

> *"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me."*

A watchman could not remain silent when danger was approaching. In the same way, the prophets had a responsibility to warn the people when their conduct was bringing them towards judgement.

Their messages were therefore not always popular. Prophets exposed sin, challenged false worship and called people to repentance. At times they spoke directly to kings, priests and entire nations.

God Communicated in Different Ways

God communicated with His prophets through different means. Scripture records:

- Dreams;
- Visions;
- Angels;
- Signs;
- Symbolic actions;
- Miracles;
- Events in nature;
- Direct words from God.

The method varied, but the purpose remained the same: God was making His will known.

Sometimes the message concerned an immediate situation. At other times, the prophet spoke about events that would occur many years later.

Warning Was Joined With Hope

Although the prophets frequently warned of judgement, their message was not only negative. They also spoke of repentance, mercy, restoration, a coming kingdom, a New Covenant, a new heart and spirit, and the coming Messiah.

This balance is important. Judgement was real, but God's purpose did not end with judgement.

Even when Israel and Judah faced captivity because of disobedience, the prophets continued to speak of what God would accomplish beyond that captivity.

The Prophets Pointed Forward

The Prophetic Books therefore belong within a much larger biblical story. They spoke directly to the people of their own generation, but their words also reached forward towards Jesus Christ.

Peter later wrote in **1 Peter 1:10-11**:

> *"Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."*

The prophets did not always fully understand everything they were declaring, but the Spirit of Christ was working through their testimony.

As we study the Prophetic Books, we therefore need to keep two questions before us: What was God saying to the people who first heard the prophet? And how does that message contribute to the unfolding revelation that leads us to Jesus Christ?

Personal Response

Key Truth

How could a prophet warn God's people while still holding out hope?

Personal Reflection

Which warning or promise do you need to hear with greater care?

Action Step

Read a prophetic message that unsettles you. What does it require you to reconsider about your conduct or confidence in God?

UNDERSTANDING THE PROPHETIC BOOKS

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The final seventeen books of the Old Testament are commonly known as the Prophetic Books. They contain the messages of prophets whom God raised up during different periods of Israel's history to warn, correct, encourage and direct His people.

These books are not arranged simply according to the order in which the prophets lived. Several prophets ministered during the same periods, while others spoke before, during or after the captivities. Understanding these historical relationships helps us place each message within its proper setting.

The Former and Latter Prophets

In the Hebrew arrangement of Scripture, prophetic material is broader than the final seventeen books of the Old Testament.

Books such as Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings are associated with what became known as the Former Prophets. These books contain historical events but also record the ministry and messages of many prophets who spoke during those periods.

The later prophetic writings are associated with the Latter Prophets. These preserve the messages of prophets whose words became individual books within Scripture.

Prophecy is therefore not limited to one small section of the Bible. Prophets appear throughout Israel's history, but the final seventeen books of the Old Testament provide a concentrated collection of prophetic messages.

Major and Minor Prophets

The seventeen Prophetic Books are commonly divided into two groups:

- Five Major Prophetic Books;
- Twelve Minor Prophetic Books.

The Major Prophetic Books are:

- Isaiah;
- Jeremiah;
- Lamentations;
- Ezekiel;
- Daniel.

The Minor Prophetic Books are:

- Hosea;
- Joel;
- Amos;
- Obadiah;
- Jonah;
- Micah;
- Nahum;
- Habakkuk;
- Zephaniah;
- Haggai;
- Zechariah;
- Malachi.

The words major and minor do not describe the importance of the prophet or the value of his message. They mainly refer to the comparative length of the books.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel contain lengthy prophetic writings, while many of the Minor Prophets are much shorter. Obadiah, for example, contains only one chapter.

Lamentations is included among the Major Prophetic Books because of its association with Jeremiah.

The Book of the Twelve

The twelve Minor Prophets have also been known collectively as the Book of the Twelve or the Twelve-Prophet Book.

These writings were gathered together as one collection and later came to be recognised as twelve individual books. Although they vary greatly in length and subject, each contains a prophetic message given for a particular people, situation or time.

The title Minor Prophets must therefore never cause us to treat their messages as unimportant. Some significant Old Testament prophecies concerning repentance, the Gospel Day, the Messiah and the work of God appear within these shorter books.

The Prophets Were Not Arranged Chronologically

One of the most important things to remember is that the Prophetic Books are not arranged in strict chronological order. Their ministries overlap with the historical events recorded in Kings and Chronicles.

Some prophets spoke to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, others to Judah, and others delivered messages concerning foreign nations. For this Study Guide, it is helpful to understand them within three broad historical periods.

Before the Captivities

Several prophets ministered before Israel and Judah were taken into captivity. Among them were Jonah and Nahum, who preached concerning Nineveh; Amos and Hosea, who addressed Israel; and Joel, Isaiah, Zephaniah, Jeremiah and Habakkuk, whose messages were directed particularly towards Judah.

These prophets repeatedly warned that continued rebellion and idolatry would bring judgement.

During the Captivities

Daniel and Ezekiel ministered during the period of Babylonian captivity. Their messages were given in very different circumstances from those of prophets who had spoken while Jerusalem and the Temple were still standing.

Even in captivity, however, God continued to speak of His purpose, restoration and what was still to come.

After the Captivities

Following the return from captivity, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi ministered to the restored community around Jerusalem.

Their messages addressed people who had returned to the land but still needed spiritual correction, encouragement and renewed devotion to God.

From Malachi to John the Baptist

Malachi is the final Prophetic Book of the Old Testament. After his ministry came a period of approximately four hundred years during which there was no continuing prophetic voice recorded in Israel. This period became known as the years of silence.

The silence was eventually broken when John the Baptist appeared, preparing the way for Jesus Christ.

Understanding this arrangement gives us an important framework for reading the prophets. Their books belong to different historical settings, yet together they form a continuing testimony of warning, judgement, repentance, restoration, hope and expectation, leading us steadily towards Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does a prophet's place before, during, or after captivity matter?

Personal Reflection

Have you read a prophetic promise without first asking who heard it?

Action Step

Before applying a prophet's words to yourself, find the original setting. What assumption will you stop making about prophecy?

THE PURPOSE AND MINISTRY OF THE PROPHETS

BACK TO CONTENTS

The prophets were called by God to speak His Word into the circumstances of their generation. Their ministry was not simply to predict future events, but to declare what God wanted His people to hear and how He wanted them to respond.

At times their messages concerned immediate sin and approaching judgement. At other times they spoke of events that would occur many years later, including the coming of Jesus Christ.

Prophets Spoke on God's Behalf

A prophet acted as a messenger of God. His authority did not come from personal position, education or popularity, but from the message God had entrusted to him.

2 Kings 24:2 states:

> *"And the LORD sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servants the prophets."*

The important expression is *"the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servants the prophets."* The prophet was the servant; the Word belonged to God.

This explains why the Prophetic Books repeatedly contain expressions such as *"Thus saith the LORD."* The prophets were not presenting personal opinion, but delivering the message God had given them.

Prophets Were Watchmen

One of the clearest pictures of prophetic ministry is that of a watchman. God said to Ezekiel in **Ezekiel 3:17**:

> *"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me."*

A watchman had the responsibility to recognise approaching danger and sound the warning. In the same way, the prophets warned Israel and Judah when sin, idolatry and disobedience were leading them towards judgement.

Their message was therefore often urgent. They called the people to repent, return to God, turn from idolatry and listen before judgement came.

Their Messages Were Often Unpopular

The prophets were not always welcomed. A message exposing sin could be difficult to hear, especially when people had become comfortable with their own way of living.

Some prophets therefore faced rejection, threats, persecution and imprisonment. Their responsibility, however, was not to make the message popular, but to deliver faithfully what God had spoken.

God Communicated in Different Ways

God did not communicate with every prophet in exactly the same manner. The Prophetic Books record:

- Dreams;
- Visions;
- Angels;
- Signs and symbols;
- Miracles;
- Events in nature;
- Direct words from God.

Some prophets were also instructed to perform symbolic actions so that their lives themselves became part of the message. The methods varied, but the source of the message remained the same.

Prophets Called the People Back to God

Much of prophetic ministry concerned the spiritual condition of God's people. The prophets warned against idolatry, injustice, false worship, disobedience and outward religion that was not matched by faithfulness of heart.

Their purpose was not simply to announce punishment. The warning gave the people an opportunity to repent and return to God before judgement came.

Prophets Also Spoke of Hope

Warning was only one part of their ministry. The prophets also spoke of restoration, the coming kingdom, the New Covenant, a new heart and spirit, the outpouring of God's Spirit and the coming Messiah.

Their messages therefore did not end with Israel's failure. They looked beyond judgement towards the greater work God would accomplish.

The Prophets Pointed Towards Jesus Christ

One of the greatest purposes of Old Testament prophecy was to prepare God's people for the coming of Jesus Christ. The prophets spoke of His birth, His ministry, His suffering, His kingdom and the salvation God would bring through Him.

Their ministry therefore moved in two directions at once. They spoke to their own generation, calling people to hear and obey God, while also pointing forward towards Jesus Christ, in whom many of their greatest promises would find their fulfilment.

As we now examine the individual Prophetic Books, this twofold purpose will remain important: We must understand what each prophet said to his own generation and also recognise how that message contributes to the continuing revelation of Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why were the prophets' calls to return to God often unwelcome?

Personal Reflection

How do you respond when the Bible challenges a comfortable belief?

Action Step

Return to a biblical warning you find uncomfortable. What response have you delayed, and how will you now act upon the truth?

ISAIAH: SALVATION, JUDGEMENT AND THE COMING MESSIAH

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. 740-680 B.C.
Approximate Period of Writing: c. 700-680 B.C.
Place in the Biblical Story: Isaiah warned Judah of judgement while giving some of the clearest Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Messiah

Isaiah is the first of the Major Prophetic Books and contains sixty-six chapters. His ministry extended through the reigns of four kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah.

The name Isaiah carries the meaning *"salvation is of the LORD,"* which suits the message of the book. Isaiah repeatedly warned of sin and judgement, but he also spoke powerfully of salvation, restoration and the coming Messiah.

Isaiah ministered during the same general period as Amos, Hosea and Micah. His message therefore belongs to a time when both Israel and Judah faced serious spiritual decline and the growing threat of foreign nations.

Judgement and Consolation

Isaiah is sometimes compared with a miniature Bible because its sixty-six chapters correspond with the sixty-six books of the Bible.

The first thirty-nine chapters are often described as the Book of Judgement, while the final twenty-seven chapters are often described as the Book of Consolation. This has been compared with the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament.

The comparison is interesting because Isaiah moves strongly from warning and judgement towards comfort, restoration and hope. Yet both parts belong to one message. God warned His people because of sin, but His purpose reached beyond judgement.

Isaiah Prophesied During the Reigns of Kings

Isaiah's ministry brought him into contact with the leadership of Judah. He prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah and witnessed significant political and spiritual changes.

His position required courage because prophetic ministry frequently meant speaking God's Word when rulers or people did not want to hear it.

Isaiah therefore demonstrates an important principle we have already seen: The prophet's responsibility was to speak faithfully rather than simply speak what people wanted to hear.

Cyrus Was Named Before His Time

One remarkable prophecy concerns Cyrus, the Persian ruler who would later play an important part in the return of the Jewish people from captivity.

Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 45:1**:

> *"Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut;"*

Isaiah named Cyrus long before the events connected with his reign took place.

This prophecy reminds us that the Prophetic Books sometimes moved beyond the immediate circumstances of the prophet's own generation. God could reveal events that would only become clear much later.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How did Isaiah's warnings and comfort speak to people in his own time?

Personal Reflection

Have you looked for hope in Isaiah without listening to its call to turn from sin?

Action Step

Read a warning and promise in Isaiah. Where have you sought comfort without acknowledging a change God requires?

Isaiah Pointed Clearly Towards Jesus Christ

One of the greatest features of Isaiah is the number of prophecies that point towards Jesus Christ. Isaiah spoke of His birth, His identity, His ministry and His suffering. These prophecies were given centuries before Jesus came.

One of the best known appears in **Isaiah 9:6-7**:

> *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this."*

These verses are especially important because the promised child is identified with extraordinary titles: *"The mighty God," "The everlasting Father"* and *"The Prince of Peace."*

Isaiah therefore does more than announce that a child would come. The child born in genuine humanity is identified as the mighty God and the everlasting Father. The prophecy points towards Jesus Christ, in whom the one true God would be revealed through genuine humanity.

The Virgin Would Conceive

Isaiah also foretold the unusual circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus.

Isaiah 7:14 states:

> *"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."*

The New Testament later connects this prophecy directly with the birth of Jesus Christ.

The name Immanuel carries the meaning *"God with us."* The prophecy therefore forms part of Isaiah's continuing testimony concerning the One whom God would reveal.

The Voice Preparing the Way

Isaiah also spoke of the messenger who would prepare the way before Christ.

Isaiah 40:3 states:

> *"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."*

The New Testament applies this prophecy to John the Baptist, whose ministry prepared people for the appearance of Jesus Christ.

Notice again the language Isaiah uses. The way is being prepared for *"the LORD"* and *"our God."*

The prophetic testimony therefore continually directs attention towards the identity of Jesus Christ.

The Suffering of Christ

Isaiah also foretold the suffering associated with the Messiah.

Isaiah 53:4-6 states:

> *"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."*

These words look beyond Isaiah's immediate generation and speak directly to the suffering and sacrificial work of Jesus Christ.

The Messiah would not come only as a ruler. He would suffer on behalf of others.

Isaiah therefore brings together two great truths concerning Christ: He is the mighty God revealed through genuine humanity, and He came to suffer for our transgressions.

Salvation Is the Great Hope of Isaiah

The name Isaiah reminds us of the great direction of his message: *"salvation is of the LORD."*

Judgement occupies a major place in the book because sin could not simply be ignored. Yet judgement was not God's final purpose. Again and again, Isaiah looks beyond failure towards the salvation God would provide.

This is why the book occupies such an important place among the Prophets. Isaiah warned his own generation faithfully, but his message also reached centuries ahead towards Jesus Christ.

The book therefore demonstrates the twofold purpose of prophecy especially clearly: God spoke to people in their immediate circumstances while also revealing the greater salvation that would come through Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How did Isaiah's words prepare people to recognise Jesus Christ?

Personal Reflection

How has the fulfilment of Isaiah's words in Jesus Christ strengthened or challenged your personal faith?

Action Step

Compare Isaiah's prophecy with its Gospel fulfilment. What does it establish about Jesus, and how will this strengthen your trust in Him?

JEREMIAH: WARNING, CAPTIVITY AND THE NEW COVENANT

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. 625-570 B.C.

Approximate Period of Writing: c. 585-570 B.C.

Place in the Biblical Story: Jeremiah warned Judah of approaching destruction, called the people to repentance and pointed forward to the New Covenant.

Jeremiah is the second of the Major Prophetic Books and contains fifty-two chapters. His ministry belongs to a dark period in Judah's history as Babylonian judgement drew nearer.

The name Jeremiah carries the meaning *"God will uplift."* God called Jeremiah while he was still a young man, and he continued prophesying for approximately forty years.

Jeremiah Was Called While Young

Jeremiah did not begin his ministry because he considered himself naturally strong or qualified. He was young, yet God appointed him to speak to Judah and gave him strength for the work.

Jeremiah experienced rejection and persecution. Even members of his own family acted against him.

Jeremiah 12:6 states:

> *"For even thy brethren, and the house of thy father, even they have dealt treacherously with thee; yea, they have called a multitude after thee: believe them not, though they speak fair words unto thee."*

Jeremiah knew what it meant to remain faithful to God's message while experiencing rejection. His weakness did not prevent God from using him.

A Message the People Did Not Want to Hear

Jeremiah repeatedly warned Judah that destruction and captivity were approaching unless the people repented. Jerusalem was their city, the Temple stood among them, and many could not accept that God would permit both to be destroyed.

False prophets contradicted Jeremiah and gave the people messages they preferred to hear. Jeremiah nevertheless continued calling the nation back to God.

Words such as *"backsliding," "return," "scattered," "captive"* and *"captivity"* appear repeatedly throughout the book. His message was clear: Judah had turned away from God and needed to return.

The Weeping Prophet

Jeremiah has often been called *"the weeping prophet."* His sorrow was not simply because people rejected him, but because he understood what their refusal to repent would bring upon them.

For approximately forty years he continued delivering God's message to people who resisted it. His ministry shows that rebellion has serious consequences.

Jeremiah Saw His Warnings Fulfilled

The people did not heed Jeremiah's warnings. Eventually the Babylonians came against Jerusalem, the city was destroyed, the Temple was ruined, and many were taken into captivity.

Jeremiah lived to see the fulfilment of the judgements he had proclaimed. Other prophets of the same general period included Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Daniel and Ezekiel.

Jeremiah therefore stands at an important turning point in Judah's history. The judgement he had warned about became historical reality.

Jeremiah Spoke of the New Covenant

Judgement was not the final word in Jeremiah. Some of the most important verses appear in Jeremiah 31, where God promises a New Covenant.

Jeremiah 31:31-33 states:

> *"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."*

God said, *"I will make a new covenant."* He also promised, *"I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts."*

Jeremiah therefore looked beyond Jerusalem's destruction and captivity towards the New Covenant that would come through Jesus Christ. God's purpose was moving towards an inward work in the heart rather than simply restoring the former outward order.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did Jeremiah continue to speak when the people did not want his message?

Personal Reflection

Do you become less willing to hear a truth when it is unwelcome?

Action Step

Read a warning from Jeremiah. What unwelcome truth do you need to receive rather than dismiss?

LAMENTATIONS: SORROW, MERCY AND FAITHFULNESS

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: After the destruction of Jerusalem, c. 585 B.C.

Approximate Date of Writing: c. 585 B.C., associated with Jeremiah

Place in the Biblical Story: A poetic expression of grief over Jerusalem's destruction while affirming God's mercy and faithfulness.

Lamentations is the third of the Major Prophetic Books and contains five chapters. It is traditionally associated with Jeremiah and reflects upon the destruction he had warned would come.

The word lamentation describes an expression of deep grief or mourning. The book has been compared to the funeral of a city because Jerusalem had fallen, the Temple had been destroyed and the devastation was visible.

Five Songs of Grief

Lamentations is formed around five poetic laments. The first four chapters use deliberate poetic structures connected with the Hebrew alphabet, while the final chapter becomes a prayer for mercy and restoration.

The structure does not lessen the sorrow. It gives expression to the deep grief that followed Judah's rebellion and the destruction of Jerusalem.

Mercy in the Middle of Sorrow

Some of the best-known verses appear in **Lamentations 3:22-23**:

> *"It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness."*

These words are especially powerful because they were spoken in a setting of devastation. Jerusalem had fallen, yet Jeremiah could still speak of *"the LORD'S mercies,"* declare that *"his compassions fail not,"* and say, *"great is thy faithfulness."*

Lamentations therefore teaches that judgement does not mean God's mercy has disappeared. Even among the ruins, the compassion and faithfulness of God remained.

Jeremiah and Lamentations belong closely together, but each has its own emphasis. Jeremiah records the warning before and during the catastrophe, while Lamentations gives voice to the sorrow after the city had fallen.

Together they move from warning to fulfilment, from rebellion to captivity, and from grief to hope. Most importantly, Jeremiah points beyond the failure of the people towards the New Covenant, while Lamentations reminds us that even in judgement the mercy and faithfulness of God remain.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How could Lamentations speak of God's mercy amid grief over Jerusalem?

Personal Reflection

When you face loss, do you remember God's faithfulness as well as the pain?

Action Step

Read Lamentations about God's mercy. What grief or disappointment will you bring honestly to God while remembering His faithfulness?

EZEKIEL: JUDGEMENT, RESTORATION AND A NEW HEART

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. 590-570 B.C., during the Babylonian captivity
Approximate Period of Writing: c. 590-570 B.C.
Place in the Biblical Story: Ezekiel warned of judgement because of sin, called the people to repentance and spoke of restoration, a coming King and the promise of a new heart and spirit.

Ezekiel is the fourth of the Major Prophetic Books and contains forty-eight chapters. His ministry began before the Babylonian invasion and continued during the period of captivity.

The name Ezekiel means *"God will strengthen."* This was fitting for a prophet called to minister during a difficult period when Judah was facing the consequences of prolonged rebellion against God.

Ezekiel Ministered During the Captivity

Ezekiel lived and prophesied among the captives in Babylon. At the same time, Jeremiah continued his ministry in Jerusalem, while Daniel was also living in captivity.

Ezekiel therefore belonged to the generation that witnessed the collapse of Judah's former national life. Jerusalem and the Temple were under threat, and many people were struggling to understand what God was doing.

His message made clear that captivity had not happened without cause. Sin, idolatry and continued disobedience had brought judgement.

A Watchman to Israel

God described Ezekiel's responsibility in **Ezekiel 3:17**:

> *"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me."*

The picture of the watchman helps us understand Ezekiel's ministry. He was responsible to hear from God and then warn the people faithfully.

His message was often severe because the condition of the people was serious. Ezekiel spoke strongly about sin, judgement and the need for repentance.

The warning was not given simply to condemn. It called the people to recognise their condition and return to God.

Ezekiel Used Signs, Symbols and Visions

Ezekiel's book contains some of the most vivid prophetic imagery in the Old Testament. God communicated through visions, symbolic actions, parables, signs and dramatic prophetic pictures.

These methods made Ezekiel's message memorable and striking. The imagery communicated spiritual truth concerning judgement, the condition of the people and the work God would yet perform.

The book begins with a vision of living creatures, while later chapters contain further symbolic descriptions, including cherubim. These images also provide important connections with other parts of Scripture.

Judgement Was Not the Final Message

Although Ezekiel warned strongly of judgement, his message did not end there. He also spoke of hope and restoration.

The same God who judged sin promised that His purpose for His people would continue. Captivity was not the end of everything God intended to do.

This movement from judgement towards restoration is one of the major features of Ezekiel. The prophet looked beyond the immediate suffering towards what God would yet accomplish.

The Promise of a Coming King

Ezekiel also looked forward to the coming of a King who would shepherd and rule God's people.

Ezekiel 37:24-25 states:

> *"And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever."*

This prophecy looks beyond the immediate circumstances of captivity. The promise of *"one shepherd"* and a king who would reign points forward to Jesus Christ.

The Jews did not fully understand that the Messiah's deliverance would be spiritual and that His people would extend beyond natural Israel. Jesus Christ came to deliver from sin and gather God's people under one Shepherd.

A New Heart and a New Spirit

One of Ezekiel's most important promises concerns the inward work God would perform within His people.

Ezekiel 36:26 states:

> *"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh."*

This promise moves beyond outward national restoration. God speaks of *"a new heart"* and *"a new spirit,"* showing that the greater work would be inward and spiritual.

The people needed more than a return to the land or the rebuilding of a city. They needed God to work within them.

This promise points towards the inward work of salvation in those who are born again. It also connects naturally with Jeremiah's promise of the New Covenant, in which God would put His law within His people and write it in their hearts.

From Exile to Hope

Ezekiel ministered to people living through enormous loss, yet God continued to speak to them. They had seen judgement come and experienced captivity, but God's purpose had not ended.

This is one of the great lessons of Ezekiel. Judgement was real, but it was not the end of God's purpose. God still spoke of restoration, a King, one Shepherd, a new heart and a new spirit.

Ezekiel therefore stands as an important bridge between the failure of the people and the greater spiritual work God would accomplish. His message ultimately directs us towards Jesus Christ, the promised King and Shepherd, and towards the inward work of salvation in which God changes the heart and gives new spiritual life.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why was judgement not the last word in Ezekiel's message?

Personal Reflection

What does the promise of a new heart show you about your need for God?

Action Step

Read Ezekiel's promise of a new heart. How does it challenge reliance upon outward change rather than the saving life of Christ?

DANIEL: KINGDOMS, PROPHECY AND GOD'S SOVEREIGN PURPOSE

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. 605-530 B.C., during the Babylonian captivity and the rise of the Medo-Persian Empire

Approximate Date of Writing: c. 530 B.C.

Place in the Biblical Story: Daniel records events from the captivity together with prophetic visions revealing the rise and fall of kingdoms and the unfolding purpose of God.

Daniel is the fifth and final book of the Major Prophets and contains twelve chapters. The name Daniel means *"God is my judge."*

Daniel was taken captive to Babylon as a young man and lived through the rule of Babylon and into the period of Medo-Persian government. His book combines events from his own life with dreams and visions concerning kingdoms and events still future from Daniel's time.

Two Main Parts of Daniel

The book naturally divides into two broad sections.

Chapters 1-6 contain the historical part of the book and are presented largely in chronological order. They record Daniel's captivity, his service under foreign rulers and several well-known events involving Daniel and his companions.

Chapters 7-12 contain prophetic dreams and visions. These chapters are not simply a continuation of the chronology of the first six chapters. Instead, they return to different periods in Daniel's life as God revealed future events to him.

Recognising this distinction helps us understand the structure of the book and prevents us from assuming that every chapter follows immediately after the previous one in time.

Faithfulness in a Foreign Land

Daniel and his companions were living far from Jerusalem in a culture that did not worship the God of Israel. Even so, they remained faithful to God.

Their faithfulness was tested repeatedly. Daniel's three companions refused to bow before Nebuchadnezzar's great image and were cast into a fiery furnace. Daniel later continued praying to God after a law made his prayers illegal, and he was cast into a den of lions.

These accounts show that captivity did not prevent God's people from remaining faithful. Daniel's life demonstrates that faithfulness to God does not depend upon favourable surroundings.

Nebuchadnezzar's Great Image

One of the most important prophecies in Daniel appears in Daniel 2. King Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of a great image composed of different materials, and God revealed both the dream and its interpretation to Daniel.

The image represented a succession of earthly kingdoms. These kingdoms would rise and fall, but the prophecy did not end with human government.

Daniel declared in **Daniel 2:44**:

> *"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever."*

Earthly kingdoms are temporary, but God's kingdom is different. Daniel said that it *"shall never be destroyed"* and *"shall stand for ever."*

The prophecy therefore directs our attention beyond human empires towards the everlasting kingdom established by God.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How did Daniel remain faithful while living under a foreign kingdom?

Personal Reflection

Which pressure makes it hard for you to remain faithful to God?

Action Step

Consider Daniel's faithful choices. What pressure are you facing, and how will Christ's life within govern your response?

History Before It Happened

Daniel contains detailed prophecies concerning kingdoms and events that were still future when the visions were received. For this reason, the book has sometimes been described as *"history before it happened."*

The visions show that the rise and fall of great empires did not take God by surprise. Babylon appeared powerful, yet Babylon itself eventually fell. Other kingdoms would follow, but none would last forever.

Daniel therefore teaches an important truth: Human kingdoms rise and fall, but God's purpose continues.

The Writing on the Wall

Daniel 5 records the final night of Belshazzar's rule in Babylon. During a great feast, a mysterious hand appeared and wrote upon the wall.

Daniel was called to interpret the message. The writing announced that Belshazzar's kingdom had been numbered, weighed and divided.

That same night Babylon fell.

The event demonstrates again that political power is temporary. A kingdom may appear secure, but no earthly ruler stands above the authority of God.

Daniel in the Lions' Den

Daniel 6 records another of the best-known events in the book. Daniel's enemies sought a reason to accuse him but could find no fault in his conduct. They therefore created a situation in which his faithfulness to God would place him in danger.

Daniel refused to abandon his practice of prayer. As a result, he was cast into the lions' den, but God preserved him.

The account shows Daniel's continuing faithfulness through changing governments. Kings changed, laws changed and empires changed, but Daniel's devotion to God remained.

The Seventy Weeks Prophecy

Daniel 9 contains important prophetic verses: the prophecy of the seventy weeks.

The prophecy concerns God's purpose for His people and points forward towards *"Messiah the Prince."* It provides an important prophetic framework leading towards the coming and work of Jesus Christ.

This prophecy will receive fuller attention in the separate study devoted to Daniel's Seventy Weeks. Here it is enough to recognise that Daniel's visions do not concern only earthly kingdoms. They also point towards the Messiah and the unfolding purpose of God.

Daniel and Revelation

Daniel is particularly important for understanding the book of Revelation. Many of the prophetic symbols, kingdoms and images found in Daniel provide a foundation for material that appears again in Revelation.

Understanding Daniel therefore helps us recognise how prophetic language introduced in the Old Testament is used again in the New Testament.

God Rules Above the Kingdoms of Men

Daniel lived through captivity, political change and the rise and fall of rulers, yet the central message of the book remains one of confidence in God.

Human kingdoms change. Kings rise and fall, and empires that appear powerful eventually disappear.

But God's purpose continues.

Daniel therefore teaches us to look beyond temporary earthly power towards the kingdom God establishes and towards the Messiah to whom prophecy points.

The book joins the other Major Prophets in directing our attention towards Jesus Christ. Isaiah foretold the Messiah, Jeremiah promised the New Covenant, Ezekiel spoke of the coming King and a new heart, and Daniel reveals an unfolding prophetic purpose in which earthly kingdoms give way before the everlasting kingdom of God.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What do Daniel's visions show about God's rule over human kingdoms?

Personal Reflection

How does that truth affect your fear of worldly power?

Action Step

Read Daniel's vision of God's kingdom. What fear of earthly power must be brought under your trust in His rule?

UNDERSTANDING THE TWELVE MINOR PROPHETS

BACK TO CONTENTS

The final twelve books of the Old Testament are commonly known as the Minor Prophets. The word minor does not mean that these prophets were less important than Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel or Daniel. It simply reflects the fact that their books are generally shorter.

The twelve Minor Prophets are:

- Hosea;
- Joel;
- Amos;
- Obadiah;
- Jonah;
- Micah;
- Nahum;
- Habakkuk;
- Zephaniah;
- Haggai;

- Zechariah;
- Malachi.

In Hebrew tradition, these writings were known collectively as the Book of the Twelve or the Twelve-Prophet Book. They were gathered together as one collection while also being recognised individually as twelve prophetic books.

Different Lengths, Different Messages

The Minor Prophets vary greatly in length. Hosea contains fourteen chapters, while Obadiah contains only one.

Their subjects also differ considerably. Some prophets spoke primarily to Israel, others to Judah, while some delivered messages concerning foreign nations such as Nineveh or Edom.

Yet they share an important characteristic: Each prophet spoke a message received from God. The repeated prophetic expression *"Thus saith the LORD"* reflects their responsibility to declare God's Word faithfully.

They Were Not Written in Chronological Order

The twelve books are not arranged according to the exact order in which the prophets lived. Some dates are clear, while the historical setting of others is less certain.

For this reason, it is helpful to place the prophets broadly within three periods.

Before the Captivities

Several Minor Prophets ministered before Israel or Judah entered captivity.

Hosea and Amos spoke particularly to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Joel, Micah, Habakkuk and Zephaniah spoke particularly in connection with Judah, while Jonah and Nahum directed important messages towards Nineveh. Obadiah pronounced judgement concerning Edom.

Their messages repeatedly warned of sin, idolatry, injustice and approaching judgement.

During the Captivities

The principal prophets ministering during the Babylonian captivity were Daniel and Ezekiel, whom we have already considered among the Major Prophets.

This helps us place the Minor Prophets within the wider historical story rather than viewing them as isolated books.

After the Captivities

The final three Minor Prophets, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, ministered after the return from Babylonian captivity.

Their messages addressed people who had returned to Jerusalem and the surrounding land but still needed encouragement, correction and renewed devotion to God.

One Continuing Prophetic Testimony

Although the twelve books are short when compared with the Major Prophets, together they contain a rich prophetic testimony. They speak of:

- Unfaithfulness and repentance;
- Judgement and mercy;
- Restoration and hope;
- The outpouring of God's Spirit;
- The Day of the LORD;
- The coming Messiah;
- The kingdom of God.

The Minor Prophets therefore continue the same great movement we have already seen in the Major Prophets. They speak directly to the circumstances of their own generations, yet again and again their messages look forward towards the greater work God would accomplish through Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why should the twelve shorter prophets be heard as distinct voices within one continuing message?

Personal Reflection

Which prophet have you overlooked because the book is short?

Action Step

Read a short prophetic book you have neglected. What warning or hope challenges the way you think or live?

HOSEA: UNFAITHFULNESS, REDEMPTION AND RETURN

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. 750-710 B.C.
Approximate Period of Writing: c. 750-710 B.C.
Place in the Biblical Story: Hosea exposed Israel's spiritual unfaithfulness while showing God's desire to restore and redeem His people.

Hosea is the first of the twelve Minor Prophets and contains fourteen chapters. His name means *"salvation,"* which fits a book that combines severe warning with a continuing message of restoration.

Hosea ministered particularly to the Northern Kingdom of Israel during a time of widespread idolatry. His early ministry took place during the reign of Jeroboam II, when Israel appeared outwardly prosperous but was spiritually unfaithful to God.

Hosea's Marriage Became Part of His Message

God instructed Hosea to marry a woman who would prove unfaithful to him. Through this painful experience, Hosea came to understand more deeply the spiritual unfaithfulness of Israel.

The nation belonged to God, yet the people repeatedly turned towards idols. Their idolatry was therefore pictured as unfaithfulness within a relationship.

Hosea 2:7 states:

> *"And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now."*

The message was deeply personal. Israel had wandered away, yet God was still calling His people to return.

A Picture of Redemption

Hosea later bought Gomer back from bondage. This became a powerful picture of redemption.

The relationship illustrates the cost of restoring one who had been unfaithful. In the greater biblical story, redemption ultimately directs us towards Jesus Christ, who gave Himself to redeem those who could not redeem themselves.

Hosea also contains a prophecy that the New Testament connects with Jesus.

Hosea 11:1 states:

> *"When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt."*

The Gospel of Matthew applies these verses to Jesus returning from Egypt. Hosea therefore speaks both to Israel's unfaithfulness and to the unfolding testimony concerning Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How did Hosea's marriage become a picture of unfaithfulness and redemption?

Personal Reflection

What does God's call to return say to someone who has turned away?

Action Step

Read Hosea's call to return. What attitude of unfaithfulness or neglect do you need to examine before God?

JOEL: JUDGEMENT, REPENTANCE AND THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: Date uncertain
Approximate Date of Writing: Uncertain
Place in the Biblical Story: Joel used devastating natural events to warn of judgement while pointing forward to the outpouring of God's Spirit.

Joel is the second of the Minor Prophets and contains three chapters. His name means *"Yahweh is God."*

During Joel's time, Judah experienced severe devastation from swarms of locusts and drought. Joel used these events to warn that greater judgement could follow if the people did not turn to God.

The book contains vivid prophetic imagery rather than a long historical narrative. Judgement is prominent, but judgement is not the final message.

The Promise of God's Spirit

Joel looked forward to a time when God would pour out His Spirit upon His people.

Joel 2:28-29 states:

> *"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit."*

This prophecy becomes especially important in the New Testament. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood before the people and declared that what they were witnessing was the fulfilment of Joel's words.

The promised outpouring had arrived.

Joel therefore provides an important prophetic connection between the Old Testament and the beginning of the Gospel Day. His message moves from warning and judgement towards the great work God would accomplish through His Spirit.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does Joel's promise of the Spirit reach beyond Joel's own time?

Personal Reflection

How does Peter's explanation of Joel challenge what you have believed about receiving the Holy Spirit?

Action Step

Compare Joel's promise with Peter's words in Acts 2. How will the fulfilment in Christ change what you expect of the Holy Spirit?

AMOS: RIGHTEOUSNESS, WARNING AND COMING JUDGEMENT

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. 760-750 B.C.
Approximate Date of Writing: c. 750 B.C.
Place in the Biblical Story: Amos warned the Northern Kingdom that outward prosperity could not protect a people who had turned away from God.

Amos is the third of the Minor Prophets and contains nine chapters. His name carries the idea of a *"burden bearer."*

Amos was a shepherd from Tekoa, a town south of Jerusalem. Although he came from Judah, God sent him north to prophesy to the Kingdom of Israel.

Prosperity Did Not Mean Spiritual Approval

Amos ministered during the reigns of Uzziah in Judah and Jeroboam II in Israel. This was a period of material prosperity, and the people found Amos's warnings difficult to accept.

Yet Amos declared that judgement was coming because of Israel's spiritual condition. The Northern Kingdom would eventually fall to Assyria in 722 B.C.

His message teaches an important truth: Outward prosperity is not proof of God's approval.

A people may appear secure while moving further away from God.

God Warned Through His Prophets

Amos wrote in **Amos 3:7**:

> *"Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets."*

This verse reflects the prophetic pattern we have already seen. God warned His people before judgement came, and His prophets were responsible to communicate faithfully what He had revealed.

Amos therefore stands as another witness to the seriousness of ignoring God's Word.

Hosea, Joel and Amos each carry a distinct message. Hosea shows the pain of spiritual unfaithfulness and the hope of redemption. Joel points towards the outpouring of God's Spirit. Amos warns that material prosperity cannot replace righteousness before God.

Together they continue the prophetic movement towards repentance, redemption and the greater work of God fulfilled in Jesus Christ and the Gospel Day.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did Amos warn people who thought prosperity showed God's approval?

Personal Reflection

Have you ever taken outward success as proof that all is well spiritually?

Action Step

Read Amos's warning against empty security. Where have outward success and inward faithfulness become separated in your life?

OBADIAH: JUDGEMENT UPON EDOM AND THE KINGDOM OF THE LORD

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: Date uncertain
Approximate Date of Writing: Uncertain
Place in the Biblical Story: Obadiah pronounced judgement upon Edom because of its pride and violence against Judah, while also speaking of restoration and the kingdom of the LORD.

Obadiah is the fourth of the Minor Prophets and contains only one chapter, making it the shortest book in the Old Testament. The name Obadiah means *"worshipper of Jehovah."*

The prophecy is directed particularly towards Edom, whose people were descended from Esau. Edom had acted cruelly towards Judah and had taken advantage of Judah's distress rather than showing compassion.

Obadiah therefore warned that Edom's pride and violence would bring judgement.

Pride Would Not Protect Edom

Edom trusted in its position and security, but Obadiah's message made clear that no nation is beyond God's judgement.

The book also looks beyond Edom's destruction towards restoration and the ultimate authority of God.

Obadiah 1:21 states:

> *"And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD'S."*

The final words are significant: *"the kingdom shall be the LORD'S."*

Obadiah therefore moves from the judgement of a proud nation towards the greater truth that ultimate rule belongs to God.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why could Edom's high position not protect it from God's judgement?

Personal Reflection

Where might pride make you feel safer than you truly are?

Action Step

Consider Obadiah's warning about pride. What attitude of superiority needs to be corrected in how you treat others?

JONAH: MERCY, REPENTANCE AND THE SIGN OF CHRIST

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. 780 B.C.
Approximate Date of Writing: c. 780 B.C.
Place in the Biblical Story: Jonah was sent to Nineveh, showing God's willingness to call even Israel's enemies to repentance.

Jonah is the fifth of the Minor Prophets and contains four chapters. His name means *"dove."*

God sent Jonah to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. This was especially difficult for Jonah because Assyria was an enemy of Israel and would later become responsible for the conquest of the Northern Kingdom.

Jonah did not initially want to carry God's message to Nineveh and attempted to flee from his assignment.

The Great Fish

Jonah's attempt to escape eventually resulted in his being cast into the sea.

Jonah 1:17 states:

> *"Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."*

Jonah remained there for three days and three nights before God delivered him.

Jesus later used Jonah's experience as a sign pointing towards His own time in the grave. Jonah's experience therefore becomes more than an extraordinary event in the life of a prophet. It also forms part of the biblical testimony leading towards Jesus Christ.

God Desired Nineveh to Repent

After Jonah finally preached in Nineveh, the people responded to the warning.

The book therefore demonstrates that God's concern was not limited to Israel alone. Even the people of Nineveh, whom Jonah regarded as enemies, were given opportunity to repent.

Jonah teaches an important lesson about mercy: God was willing to send His warning even to a nation Jonah did not want to see spared.

The book therefore exposes not only Nineveh's need for repentance, but also Jonah's need to understand the mercy of God.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What does God's concern for Nineveh show about mercy and repentance?

Personal Reflection

Are you reluctant to hope that God may show mercy to someone you dislike?

Action Step

Think of someone you have been unwilling to see receive mercy. What change of heart should accompany your prayer for them?

MICAH: JUDGEMENT, RESTORATION AND THE COMING RULER

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. 735-710 B.C.
Approximate Period of Writing: c. 735-710 B.C.
Place in the Biblical Story: Micah warned Israel and Judah of judgement while pointing forward to the coming kingdom and the birth of the Messiah.

Micah is the sixth of the Minor Prophets and contains seven chapters. His name means *"Who is like Jehovah?"*

Micah ministered during the same general period as Isaiah and Hosea. His ministry took place during the troubled years surrounding the Assyrian invasion of the Northern Kingdom.

His earlier messages warned both Israel and Judah because of their idolatry and rebellion. His later prophecies look forward towards restoration and the coming kingdom.

The Ruler From Bethlehem

One of Micah's best-known prophecies concerns the place from which the Messiah would come.

Micah 5:2 states:

> *"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."*

Centuries before the birth of Jesus Christ, Micah identified Bethlehem as the place from which the promised Ruler would come.

The prophecy does more than name a location. It also declares that His *"goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."*

Micah therefore joins Isaiah and the other prophets in directing us towards Jesus Christ.

Obadiah, Jonah and Micah each carry a distinct message. Obadiah warns that pride and cruelty will be judged. Jonah reveals the breadth of God's mercy and provides a sign pointing towards Christ. Micah moves from judgement towards the promise of the everlasting Ruler who would come from Bethlehem.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did Micah speak of a ruler coming from Bethlehem amid judgement?

Personal Reflection

How does this promise strengthen your confidence in God's continuing purpose?

Action Step

Read Micah's promise of the coming Ruler and its fulfilment. What hope or fear should now be governed by your trust in Christ?

NAHUM: JUDGEMENT UPON NINEVEH

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. 650 B.C.
Approximate Date of Writing: c. 650 B.C.
Place in the Biblical Story: Nahum announced the coming destruction of Nineveh and showed that Assyria's strength could not prevent the fulfilment of God's judgement.

Nahum is the seventh of the Minor Prophets and contains three chapters. His name means *"comfort"* or *"consolation."*

The book focuses upon Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. About two centuries earlier, Jonah had preached to Nineveh and the people had responded to his warning. By Nahum's time, however, the situation was very different.

God sent Nahum with a message that Nineveh would be destroyed. Unlike the generation that heard Jonah, the people did not repent.

Assyria's Strength Would Not Save Nineveh

Nahum's prophecy was given while Assyria was still a powerful empire. From a human point of view, the complete destruction of Nineveh may have appeared unlikely.

Assyria had already demonstrated its military strength and would take the Northern Kingdom of Israel into captivity. Yet military success did not mean that Assyria was beyond God's judgement.

Nahum's prophecy was eventually fulfilled when Nineveh fell in 612 B.C.

The message therefore reinforces an important lesson already seen throughout the Prophets: Political strength cannot protect a nation from the consequences of persistent wickedness.

Nahum's book is short, but its message is clear. God had shown mercy to Nineveh in Jonah's generation, but when later generations returned to wickedness and refused warning, judgement followed.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did Nineveh's power fail to protect it from the judgement Nahum announced?

Personal Reflection

What does this warning teach you about trusting human strength?

Action Step

Read Nahum's warning about human power. What position or influence have you trusted more than the LORD?

HABAKKUK: QUESTIONS, FAITH AND TRUST IN GOD

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. 615-605 B.C.
Approximate Date of Writing: c. 615-605 B.C.
Place in the Biblical Story: Habakkuk wrestled with difficult questions during a dark period in Judah and learned to continue trusting God when circumstances were troubling.

Habakkuk is the eighth of the Minor Prophets and contains three chapters. His name means *"the one who embraces,"* an appropriate description of a prophet who continued to cling to God during difficult circumstances.

Habakkuk ministered in Judah during a spiritually dark period. The Northern Kingdom had already fallen to Assyria, while Judah itself was moving towards the Babylonian invasion that would eventually destroy Jerusalem and the Temple.

Habakkuk Asked God Difficult Questions

The book is distinctive because much of it takes the form of a conversation between Habakkuk and God.

Habakkuk looked at the wickedness around him and struggled to understand what God was doing. Rather than pretending that he had no questions, he brought those questions before God.

This makes Habakkuk especially valuable when believers face circumstances that are difficult to understand. The book teaches that faith does not mean that a person never asks questions. Faith means continuing to trust God even while some questions remain unresolved.

"The Just Shall Live by His Faith"

One of the most important statements in the book appears in **Habakkuk 2:4**:

> *"Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith."*

The contrast is between pride and faith. The proud person depends upon himself, but *"the just shall live by his faith."*

This principle later appears repeatedly in the New Testament and becomes an important statement concerning the life of faith.

Habakkuk therefore moves from questioning towards confidence. His circumstances remained serious, but his trust became centred upon God rather than upon what he could see around him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How could Habakkuk ask hard questions and still live by faith?

Personal Reflection

What question do you need to bring honestly before God while trusting Him?

Action Step

Bring a present question honestly before God. How will Habakkuk's teaching on faith change the way you respond while waiting?

ZEPHANIAH: JUDGEMENT, THE DAY OF THE LORD AND JOY

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. 635-625 B.C.
Approximate Date of Writing: c. 635-625 B.C.
Place in the Biblical Story: Zephaniah warned of approaching judgement while also giving comfort to the faithful and pointing towards the Day of the LORD.

Zephaniah is the ninth of the Minor Prophets and contains three chapters. His name means *"Jehovah hides"* or *"treasured by God."*

Zephaniah was a descendant of King Hezekiah and ministered during the early years of King Josiah's reign. He lived during a period when Judah needed strong spiritual warning.

His message begins with serious declarations of judgement, but it does not remain there.

Judgement and Comfort

Zephaniah warned that judgement was approaching because of the spiritual condition of the people. Yet he also spoke words of comfort to those who remained faithful to God.

The movement of the book is therefore striking. It begins with warning and sorrow but ends with hope and joy.

The final chapter contains some of the book's strongest words of encouragement and brings the prophecy to a very different conclusion from the severity with which it begins.

The Day of the LORD

A major theme in Zephaniah is the Day of the LORD, which appears repeatedly throughout the book.

Within the wider prophetic message, this theme directs attention towards the Gospel Day and the work God would accomplish through Jesus Christ.

Zephaniah therefore joins the other prophets in moving from immediate judgement towards a greater prophetic hope.

Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah each speak from different circumstances. Nahum announces judgement upon Nineveh. Habakkuk teaches faith in the midst of unanswered questions. Zephaniah moves from judgement towards comfort, joy and the Day of the LORD.

Together they remind us that God judges wickedness, receives those who trust Him, and continues moving His purpose towards its fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do warning and comfort meet in Zephaniah's message about the day of the LORD?

Personal Reflection

Do you take both God's judgement and His care for His people seriously?

Action Step

Read a warning and promise in Zephaniah. What should change in your attitude towards God's judgement and His care?

HAGGAI: PUTTING GOD FIRST AND REBUILDING THE TEMPLE

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. 526 B.C., after the Babylonian captivity
Approximate Date of Writing: c. 526 B.C.
Place in the Biblical Story: Haggai encouraged the returned people of Judah to put God first and complete the rebuilding of the Temple.

Haggai is the tenth of the Minor Prophets and contains two chapters. His name is believed to be a shortened form of Haggiah, meaning *"Festival of Jehovah."*

Haggai ministered after many of the Jewish people had returned from Babylonian captivity to Jerusalem. The people had begun rebuilding the Temple, but the work had stopped.

Instead of giving proper attention to the house of God, many had become occupied with building and improving their own houses. Haggai therefore called them to examine their priorities.

The Work Had Been Neglected

The people had reasons for why the Temple had not been completed, but Haggai challenged their excuses. They had found time and resources for their own interests while the work connected with the house of the LORD remained unfinished.

His message was practical: Put God first.

Haggai encouraged the people to resume the rebuilding and complete what they had begun. This makes Haggai different from many prophets whose warnings were repeatedly rejected. In Haggai's case, the people listened and obeyed.

Their response demonstrates that prophetic warning could accomplish its intended purpose when people were willing to hear and act.

Haggai's message therefore reminds us that spiritual priorities can easily be displaced by personal concerns. The people had returned from captivity, but returning to the land was not enough. Their relationship with God still needed to be reflected in the way they lived and in what they placed first.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why was it wrong to neglect rebuilding the temple while attending to personal houses?

Personal Reflection

What have you given attention to while leaving a duty to God undone?

Action Step

Identify a neglected responsibility in your life. What attitude must change, and what first step will you take to fulfil it?

ZECHARIAH: RESTORATION, HOPE AND THE COMING MESSIAH

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. 520-484 B.C., after the Babylonian captivity
Approximate Period of Writing: c. 520-484 B.C.
Place in the Biblical Story: Zechariah encouraged those rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple while giving extensive prophecies concerning the coming Messiah.

Zechariah is the eleventh of the Minor Prophets and contains fourteen chapters. His name means *"Jehovah remembers."*

That name was especially meaningful for people who had experienced captivity. Jerusalem had been destroyed, the Temple had fallen, and the nation had endured years of exile, yet God had not forgotten His purpose.

Zechariah ministered during the same general period as Haggai. Both prophets spoke to people who had returned from Babylon and were involved in rebuilding the Temple.

Encouragement for the Returned People

The first eight chapters of Zechariah are directed particularly towards the returned exiles and those involved in rebuilding the Second Temple.

Haggai's ministry strongly challenged the people concerning their priorities, while Zechariah's messages carried a strong emphasis upon hope and encouragement. The people needed both.

They needed correction when the work was neglected, but they also needed reassurance that God had not abandoned them. Zechariah's name itself reinforced that message: Jehovah remembers.

Their years of captivity did not mean that God's purpose had been forgotten.

Zechariah Looked Towards the Messiah

The final six chapters move especially towards prophecy concerning the coming Messiah. Among the Minor Prophets, Zechariah contains an especially rich concentration of references to the Messiah.

The rebuilding of the Temple was important in Zechariah's own generation, but God's purpose extended far beyond the physical restoration of Jerusalem. A greater work was coming.

The prophets had already spoken of a New Covenant, a new heart, the outpouring of the Spirit, an everlasting kingdom and a Ruler from Bethlehem. Zechariah continues that developing testimony by directing attention towards the Messiah.

His book therefore joins restoration and expectation together. God was restoring His people after captivity, but the greater hope still lay ahead in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How did Zechariah encourage the returned people while looking towards the Messiah?

Personal Reflection

What hope helps you continue when faithful work seems small?

Action Step

Read Zechariah's promise of the Messiah. How will its fulfilment in Jesus strengthen faithfulness in work that seems small?

MALACHI: EMPTY WORSHIP, REPENTANCE AND THE COMING MESSENGER

BACK TO CONTENTS

Approximate Historical Setting: c. 433-424 B.C.
Approximate Period of Writing: c. 433-424 B.C.
Place in the Biblical Story: Malachi confronted empty worship and spiritual decline while pointing forward to the messenger who would prepare the way for Jesus Christ.

Malachi is the twelfth and final Minor Prophet and the final book of the Old Testament. It contains four chapters.

The name Malachi means *"messenger of Jehovah."*

By the time Malachi ministered, the people had been back in the land for more than a century. The Temple had been rebuilt, yet outward restoration had not automatically produced inward faithfulness.

A Form of Worship Without the Heart

Malachi confronted people who continued religious practices while their hearts were not truly devoted to God. The problem was not the absence of worship. There was worship, but much of it had become an outward form without the corresponding sincerity of heart.

Malachi also rebuked idolatry and unfaithfulness among the people.

Malachi 2:11 states:

> *"Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god."*

The priests themselves also shared responsibility for leading the people away from faithfulness. Malachi therefore warned both the religious leaders and the people and called them to repentance.

The Coming Messenger

Malachi also looked beyond his own generation.

Malachi 4:5 states:

> *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:"*

This prophecy pointed towards the coming ministry of John the Baptist, who would come in the spirit and power of Elijah and prepare the way for Jesus Christ.

Malachi also wrote in **Malachi 4:2**:

> *"But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall."*

The final Prophetic Book therefore closes with expectation.

Haggai called the returned people to put God first. Zechariah encouraged them with restoration and hope while pointing towards the Messiah. Malachi exposed empty outward religion and looked forward to the messenger who would prepare the way for Christ.

After Malachi came approximately four hundred years without a continuing prophetic voice recorded in Israel. Then John the Baptist appeared, preparing the way for the One towards whom the prophets had been pointing: Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did Malachi challenge worship that continued outwardly without the heart?

Personal Reflection

Is there a part of your worship that has become routine without sincere response?

Action Step

Consider Malachi's warning about empty worship. What part of your devotion to God needs a more sincere response?

JESUS CHRIST: THE GREATEST PROPHET

BACK TO CONTENTS

Place in the Biblical Story: Jesus Christ is the Prophet foretold by Moses, the fulfilment towards whom the Old Testament prophets pointed, and the One through whom God has spoken in the Gospel Day.

The Old Testament prophets carried messages from God across many generations. They warned of judgement, called people to repentance, promised restoration and repeatedly pointed forward to the coming Messiah.

Yet the prophets themselves did not fully understand everything they were declaring. Many of their prophecies would only become clear when Jesus Christ came.

The Prophets Searched Their Own Prophecies

Peter explains that the prophets carefully considered the salvation about which they had spoken.

1 Peter 1:10-12 states:

> *"Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the Gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into."*

These verses help us understand the prophetic ministry. The prophets spoke by the Spirit of Christ, yet they still searched to understand the time and manner in which their words would be fulfilled.

Their prophecies therefore reached beyond their own generation. They were ministering truths that would become clearer when Jesus Christ came and the Gospel was preached.

Moses Foretold a Great Prophet

Long before Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel or Daniel, Moses had spoken of a Prophet who would come.

Deuteronomy 18:15-18 states:

> *"The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him."*

Moses did not simply say that another prophet would arise. He spoke of *"a Prophet"* whom the people were commanded to hear.

God said, *"I will put my words in his mouth,"* and *"he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him."*

This prophecy established an expectation that continued through the Old Testament.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did the prophets' search for understanding point beyond their own time?

Personal Reflection

How has their witness changed the way you listen to Jesus Christ?

Action Step

Read Moses' promise of the Prophet and its fulfilment in Jesus. What difference should listening to Christ make in your choices?

Peter Identified the Prophet as Jesus Christ

The New Testament identifies the Prophet foretold by Moses.

Peter declared in **Acts 3:20-22**:

> *"And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you."*

Peter directly connects the prophecy of Moses with Jesus Christ.

The command is significant: *"him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you."*

Jesus is not simply one more prophet added to a long list. He is the promised Prophet to whom Moses directed the people.

The Prophets Pointed Towards Him

When we look back over the Prophetic Books, we can see how their messages prepare the way for Christ.

Isaiah spoke of the child who would be called *"The mighty God"* and *"The everlasting Father."*

Jeremiah promised a New Covenant in which God's law would be written within the heart.

Ezekiel spoke of a new heart, a new spirit and one Shepherd over God's people.

Daniel pointed towards Messiah the Prince and an everlasting kingdom.

The Minor Prophets continued the same testimony. Hosea, Joel, Micah, Zechariah and Malachi all contributed to the expectation that would find its fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

Together, the Prophetic Books form a continuing testimony leading towards one Person: Jesus Christ.

God Has Spoken Through His Son

The opening words of Hebrews bring the prophetic age and the revelation of Jesus Christ together.

Hebrews 1:1-2 states:

> *"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;"*

God had spoken *"at sundry times and in divers manners"* through the prophets. Their ministry was genuine and God-given.

Hebrews then makes the important contrast: *"Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son."*

The prophetic testimony was moving towards Jesus Christ. God had spoken through many servants, but the One who came was the Son Himself.

Jesus Christ Is the Greatest Prophet

Jesus Christ is therefore the greatest Prophet. He is the Prophet promised by Moses and the One towards whom the testimony of the prophets pointed.

Yet He is also more than a prophet. The prophets were servants through whom God spoke, but Jesus Christ is the One identified by Isaiah as *"The mighty God"* and *"The everlasting Father."* The one true God was revealed through genuine humanity in Jesus Christ.

This gives the prophetic story its proper conclusion. The prophets proclaimed the coming Messiah. Moses foretold the great Prophet. Peter identified that Prophet as Jesus, and Hebrews declares that God has spoken through His Son.

The direction of prophecy is therefore not towards endless expectation. It brings us to Jesus Christ, the Prophet of the Gospel Day and the fulfilment of the hope proclaimed throughout the Old Testament.

As we finish our study of the Prophetic Books, the central truth is clear: The prophets prepared the way, but Jesus Christ is the One to whom they were pointing.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did Peter identify Jesus as the Prophet Moses had promised?

Personal Reflection

Do you receive Jesus' words as God's decisive call to you?

Action Step

Choose one teaching of Jesus that has challenged you. What change in belief or conduct will show that you have heard Him?

CONCLUSION: THE PROPHETS POINTED FORWARD TO JESUS CHRIST

BACK TO CONTENTS

The Prophetic Books bring the Old Testament to a powerful conclusion. Across many generations, God raised up prophets to warn, correct, encourage and guide His people. Yet

their testimony also reached beyond the circumstances of their own day towards the coming of Jesus Christ.

The prophets ministered during very different periods. Some spoke before the captivities, others during exile, and others after the people returned to Jerusalem. Their historical circumstances changed, but several themes continually appeared: sin, repentance, judgement, mercy, restoration, hope and the coming Messiah.

From Warning to Hope

The prophets warned that rebellion against God had consequences. Israel and Judah could not continue in idolatry, injustice and empty religious practice while expecting outward covenant privileges to protect them from judgement.

Yet judgement was never the entire message. God repeatedly revealed that His purpose would continue beyond human failure.

Isaiah foretold the coming Messiah. Jeremiah promised a New Covenant. Ezekiel spoke of a new heart, a new spirit and one Shepherd. Daniel revealed the rise and fall of earthly kingdoms and pointed towards an everlasting kingdom.

The Minor Prophets continued the same testimony through promises of redemption, the outpouring of God's Spirit, the coming Ruler, the Day of the LORD and the messenger who would prepare the way.

The Prophets Were Preparing the Way

The prophets did not always fully understand the things they proclaimed, yet the Spirit of Christ was working through their testimony. Their words became part of an unfolding revelation that would become clearer when Jesus Christ came.

Jesus Himself confirmed that the prophets were speaking concerning Him.

Jesus said in **Luke 24:44**:

> *"And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me."*

The Prophets therefore cannot be understood properly if Jesus Christ is removed from their message. Their warnings addressed real circumstances in their own generations, but their greater testimony continued moving towards Him.

God Has Spoken Through His Son

The writer of Hebrews brings the entire prophetic story into focus.

Hebrews 1:1-2 states:

> *"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;"*

God truly spoke through the prophets, but their ministry was preparing the way for something greater. God has now spoken through His Son.

The great direction of the Prophetic Books is therefore clear: the prophets warned, promised and pointed forward, and Jesus Christ came.

As we leave the Old Testament Prophets and prepare to enter the New Testament, expectation becomes fulfilment. The One whom Moses foretold, whom Isaiah described, whom Jeremiah anticipated through the New Covenant, and towards whom the prophets continually pointed now stands before us in the Gospel record.

Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the prophetic hope.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do warning, repentance, restoration, and hope lead the prophets' witness to Christ?

Personal Reflection

Which truth about Jesus revealed by the prophets should now govern your faith or daily conduct?

Action Step

Return to the prophecy that most clearly reveals Christ. How will this truth reshape your trust, worship or treatment of others?

SUBMISSION TO COGMA FOR APPRAISAL

Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

What were the prophets sent to do, and how do Isaiah's promised Messiah, Jeremiah's warning and new covenant, and Ezekiel's promise of a new heart hold judgement and hope together?

2. Understanding

How do Daniel's visions of kingdoms and God's sovereign purpose fit the prophetic books' expectation of Jesus Christ? Explain how prophecy can be read faithfully without treating every symbol as an isolated prediction.

3. Personal Reflection

Which warning speaks most directly to you: Hosea's picture of unfaithfulness, Joel's call to repentance and promise of the Spirit, or Amos's demand for righteousness? Explain the response it requires.

4. Response to Truth

God's justice and mercy appear in the messages to Edom and Nineveh, and hope appears in Micah's promised ruler. Has this teaching corrected the way you think about whom God may judge or show mercy? Explain how it should affect your response to others.

5. Action Step

Choose Haggai's call to give God's work proper attention. What neglected duty or attitude needs correction, and what first step will you take as Christ's life within governs you?

6. Early Response

Have you begun responding to that neglected duty or attitude? Describe any change in your priorities or conduct. If not, explain what has held you back.

7. Ongoing Practice

What ongoing practice will help you hold on to God's faithfulness in Lamentations, trust Him with Habakkuk's questions and heed Zephaniah's warning about the day of the LORD while awaiting promised joy?

8. Doctrinal Clarity

How do Jeremiah's new covenant, Ezekiel's new heart and Joel's promise of the Spirit clarify why outward reform alone cannot produce the obedience the prophets called for?

9. Living the Truth

Where do you face a choice between ignoring a warning and responding with repentance, justice or faithful worship? Explain your next step using a teaching from Isaiah, the twelve Minor Prophets or the promised restoration.

10. Final Response

Bring together the prophets' warnings, their calls to return, and their promises of a new covenant, a new heart, and God's Spirit. How do these truths lead you to Jesus Christ as the greatest Prophet, and what response will you make?