

The Prophets



Scripture

Isaiah 46:4 • Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

Isaiah 53:5 • But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Joel 2:13 • Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

Hosea 10:12 • Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers righteousness on you.

Zechariah 4:6 • So 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 Almighty.'

Micah 6:8 • He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Ezekiel 36:26 • I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

Jeremiah 29:13 • You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Isaiah 4:4-5 • He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Introduction to the Prophets

What is prophecy?

Does the apparent contradiction within the assertions of a prophet destroy the validity of his message? It would if prophecy dealt only with laws or principles. But the prophet deals with relations between God and man, where contradiction is inevitable. Escape from God and return to him are inextricable parts of man's existence. Conformity to logical standards is not characteristic of man's conduct, which is why contradiction is inherent in prophecy. ... We will have to look for prophetic coherence, not in what the prophet says but of whom he speaks. Indeed, not even the word of God is the ultimate object and theme of [the prophet's] consciousness. The ultimate object and theme of his consciousness is God, of whom the prophet knows that above his judgment and above his anger stands his mercy.

--Abraham Heschel

What is a prophet?

The Message of the Prophet

Function of the Prophets (chart taken from A Survey of the Old Testament, page 405)				
Period	Function	Audience	Message	Examples
Pre-monarchy			National guidance; Maintenance of justice; Spiritual overseer	
Pre-classical			Military advice; Pronouncement of rebuke or blessing	
Classical			Rebuke concerning current condition of society; leads to warnings of captivity, destruction, exile, and promise of eventual restoration; Call for justice and repentance	

What is divine pathos?

What does the prophet primarily communicate?

The pages of the prophetic writings are filled with echoes of divine love and disappointment, mercy and indignation. The God of Israel is never impersonal.

—Abraham Heschel

What is the difference between YHWH and all the other false gods?

What are some examples of a message of judgment? A message of hope?

What did God really want from Israel?

An analysis of prophetic utterances shows that the fundamental experience of the prophet is a fellowship with the feelings of God, a sympathy with the divine pathos, a communion with the divine consciousness which comes about through the prophet's reflection of, or participation in, the divine pathos. The typical prophetic state of mind is one of being taken up into the heart of the divine pathos. Sympathy is the prophet's answer to inspiration, the correlative to revelation.

--Abraham Heschel

Who Is the Prophet?

Why were the prophets so lonely?

The prophet is a lonely man. He alienates the wicked as well as the pious, the cynics as well as the believers, the priests and the princes, the judges and the false prophets. But to be a prophet means to challenge and to defy and to cast out fear.

--Abraham Heschel

What was the prophet's life like?

What was the primary role of the prophet?

How was this role ultimately fulfilled?

His fundamental objective was to reconcile man and God. Why do the two need reconciliation? Perhaps it is due to man's false sense of sovereignty, to his abuse of freedom, to his aggressive, sprawling pride, resenting God's involvement in history.

--Abraham Heschel

Closer Look: Hosea 2

What is happening in verses 2-13?

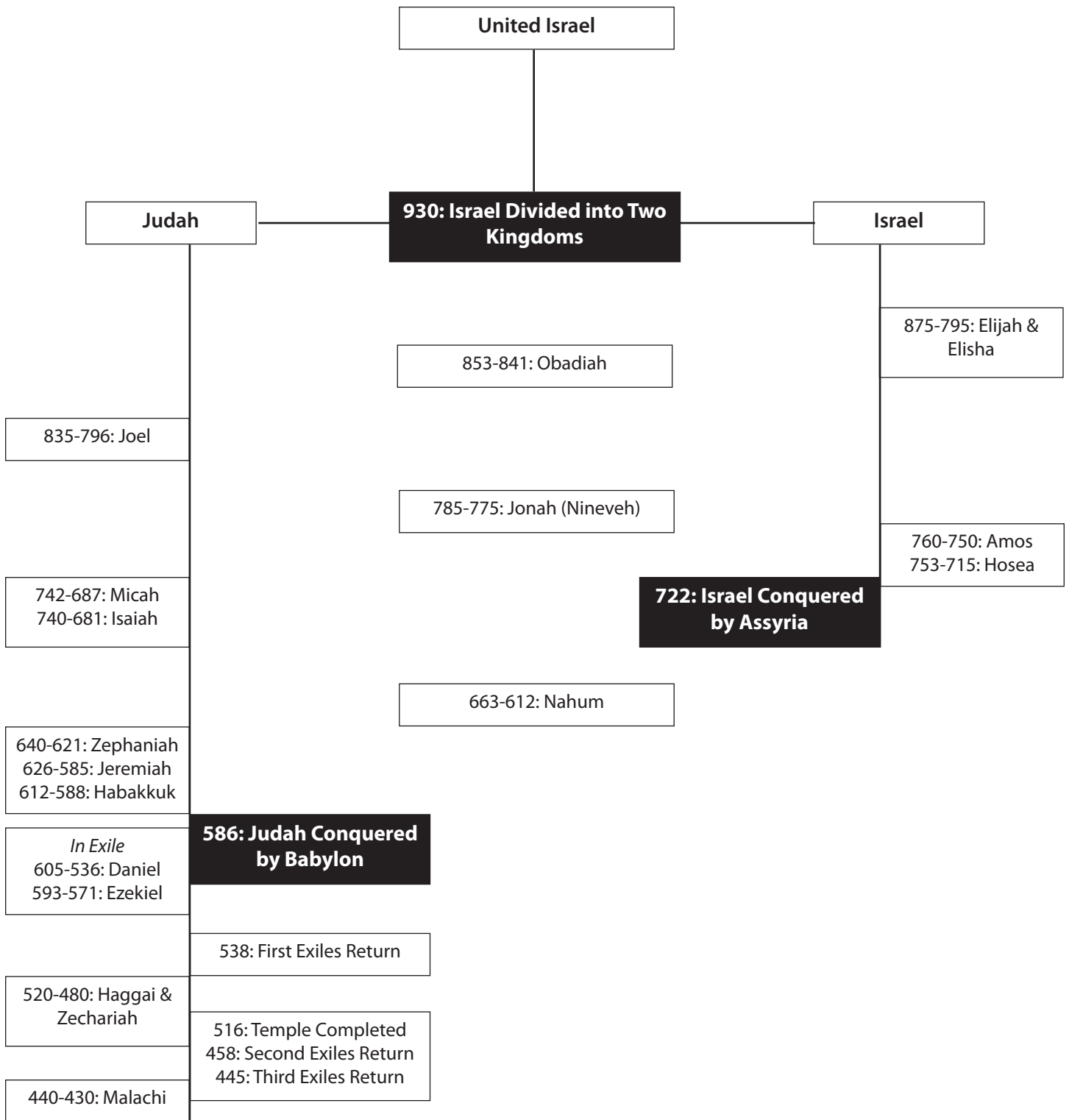
Why is a worldview of Transcendence so much more difficult to maintain than a worldview of Continuity?

What is happening in verses 14-23?

What replaces all of the “I will” statements of the first half of this chapter?

What is the meaning of the name Jezreel?

How has this prophecy come true?



Hosea 2:2-13 | Divorce

2 "Rebuke your mother, rebuke her,

for she is not my wife,

and I am not her husband.

Let her remove the adulterous look from her face

and the unfaithfulness from between her breasts.

3 Otherwise I will strip her naked

and make her as bare as on the day she was born;

I will make her like a desert,

turn her into a parched land,

and slay her with thirst.

4 I will not show my love to her children,

because they are the children of adultery.

5 Their mother has been unfaithful

and has conceived them in disgrace.

She said, 'I will go after my lovers,

who give me my food and my water,

my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.'

6 Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes;

I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way.

7 She will chase after her lovers but not catch them;

she will look for them but not find them.

Then she will say,

'I will go back to my husband as at first,

for then I was better off than now.'

8 She has not acknowledged that I was the one

who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil,

who lavished on her the silver and gold—

which they used for Baal.

9 "Therefore I will take away my grain when it ripens,

and my new wine when it is ready.

I will take back my wool and my linen,

intended to cover her nakedness.

10 So now I will expose her lewdness

before the eyes of her lovers;

no one will take her out of my hands.

11 I will stop all her celebrations:

her yearly festivals, her New Moons,

her Sabbath days—all her appointed feasts.

12 I will ruin her vines and her fig trees,

which she said were her pay from her lovers;

I will make them a thicket,

and wild animals will devour them.

13 I will punish her for the days

she burned incense to the Baals;

she decked herself with rings and jewelry,

and went after her lovers,

but me she forgot,"

declares the LORD.

Hosea 2:14-23 | Remarriage

14 "Therefore I am now going to allure her;

I will lead her into the desert

and speak tenderly to her.

15 There I will give her back her vineyards,

and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.

There she will sing as in the days of her youth,

as in the day she came up out of Egypt.

16 "In that day," declares the LORD,

"you will call me 'my husband';

you will no longer call me 'my master.'

17 I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips;

no longer will their names be invoked.

18 In that day I will make a covenant for them

with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air

and the creatures that move along the ground.

Bow and sword and battle

I will abolish from the land,

so that all may lie down in safety.

19 I will betroth you to me forever;

I will betroth you in righteousness and justice,

in love and compassion.

20 I will betroth you in faithfulness,

and you will acknowledge the LORD.

21 "In that day I will respond,"

declares the LORD—

"I will respond to the skies,

and they will respond to the earth;

22 and the earth will respond to the grain,

the new wine and oil,

and they will respond to Jezreel.

23 I will plant her for myself in the land;

I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.'

I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people';

and they will say, 'You are my God.'"

Discussion Questions

Are you a prophet? Are you called to be a prophet? What do you suppose a prophet might look like nowadays?

What is the prophetic role of the Church? How has the Church upheld or abandoned that role?

If you were a prophet to Israel or Judah, what sort of message would you preach? How would you communicate your message? Would you write poetry? Shout on the streets? Do dramatic reenactments? Give object lessons?

Do you live in the heart of God? If you do, what is it like? If you don't, do you want to? What do you imagine it would be like to have constant, intense communion with God?

Where do you sense God calling you to take a stand? What do you see going on that you know is wrong? Are you afraid to speak truth to power?

Bibliography

Andrew Hill & John Walton | A Survey of the Old Testament

Abraham Heschel | The Prophets

Duane Garret | The Archeological Study Bible

Isaiah | Outline

1-12 | holy | Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory. (6:3b)

The first five chapters of Isaiah's prophecy are like a prologue that set up the whole book and provide a framework for Isaiah's life, ministry, and message. Judah has abandoned YHWH, despite her great prosperity and expansion under King Uzziah. In the year that Uzziah died, Isaiah had his life-defining vision of YHWH in the temple. He saw God high and lifted up, and the seraphs cried 'holy, holy, holy.' This vision of God's holiness defined Isaiah's message for the next 40 years.

The next five chapters contain three key messianic prophecies. The first is a sign to King Ahaz that Judah will not be overrun by her enemies. That sign is the promise of the virgin birth. The second messianic prophecy is one that is familiar to us at Christmas: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given. ... And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." The third messianic prophecy is the Branch/Root of Jesse. Christians understand these prophecies to mean three things: The Messiah will be a descendant of David, he will be born of a virgin, and he will be God himself.

13-39 | woe | On this mountain he will...swallow up death forever. (25:7a, 8a)

The second portion of the first book (Isaiah is generally said to have two books: 1-39 and 40-66) is taken up almost entirely with judgments and woes against the nations. A great deal of these judgments are levied against Jerusalem and Judah. Isaiah, here, elaborates on the themes he introduced in the prologue, with the primary emphasis being (as with all of the prophets to Israel and Judah) the covenant faithlessness of God's chosen people.

The last four chapters of the book are the historical interlude, much of the material being found in 2 Chronicles. It is the story of Hezekiah, the threat from Assyria, his illness and recovery, and his dealings with the envoy from Babylon. It is a bridge not simply between the two books of Isaiah, but between the fate of the two nations of Israel—with Assyria destroying the northern kingdom and Babylon destroying the southern kingdom.

40-53 | servant | But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. (53:5)

The second book of Isaiah begins with a strong message of comfort, as the prophet looks forward to, and then beyond, a time of exile and destruction. The Servant of the Lord is introduced almost immediately, and his praises are sung (right next to the praises of YHWH) throughout this section. The identity of the servant is unclear. At first it seems that it might be Isaiah himself, but then, in chapter 44, it seems that Israel might be the servant. Then, in 45:1, it appears that Cyrus is the Lord's servant, but in chapter 49 the tide turns back to Isaiah.

The crowning servant song, that of the Suffering Servant of 52:13-53:12, reveals the identity of the servant, but not for another 700 years or so after it was written. The servant is, clearly, Jesus, and it was he who suffered on behalf of the sins and transgressions of the people.

54-66 | eschaton | Behold, I will create a new heavens and a new earth. (65:17)

Isaiah's prophecy ends with the foundations of the Gospels and the Book of Revelation. The prophet offers hope to the downtrodden and speaks of the future salvation of the world. He gives comfort to the humble and speaks of the great Redeemer coming to Zion and a new covenant in the Spirit. He also promises a new heaven and a new earth with a new, re-created Jerusalem at the center. Isaiah truly lays the foundations for the Gospel in his prophecy, and especially here at the end: "All mankind will come and bow down before me." (66:23b)

Jeremiah | Outline

1-10 | return | “Return, faithless Israel,” declares the Lord, “I will frown on you no longer.” (3:12b)

We are introduced to the prophet Jeremiah at the very beginning of his book with those famous words, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.” Jeremiah is the most personal of the prophets, frequently writing about himself, his life, and his intimate relationship with God. (“O Lord, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed.” (20:7) His was a tragic calling—presiding over the destruction of Jerusalem. He seems like a reluctant prophet, frequently trying to keep his mouth shut but unable to because the word of God was like a fire in his bones.

His initial message to Judah was one of repentance—a call to return to YHWH. Things went well, at first. But after the great king Josiah died, everything went downhill quickly. Jeremiah lived to see the reform movement under Josiah and the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

11-23 | disaster | And if they ask you, ‘Where shall we go?’ tell them, ‘This is what the Lord says: Those destined for death, to death; those for the sword, to the sword; those for starvation, to starvation; those for captivity, to captivity.’ (15:2)

It is too late. The people have broken the covenant for the last time. Indeed, they have never consistently kept their end of the bargain with God. The disaster that God has threatened for generations is finally going to come in the form of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Drought, famine, and sword are coming upon the people of Judah, and they will be sent into exile to Babylon. However, God does not bring disaster without leaving a glimmer of hope. A ‘Righteous Branch’ will come, one from the line of David—a King—who will reign wisely and save both Judah and Israel. His name will be ‘YHWH Our Righteousness.’

24-45 | jerusalem | You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. (29:13)

This large section of Jeremiah includes a stylistic shift from predominately poetry to prose. This section also contains a great deal of historical and biographical information. Jeremiah was threatened with death because he prophesied that Babylon would destroy Jerusalem, and anyone who would go over to the Babylonians would live, but all who resisted would die, which was understood as treason and sedition by the rulers of Jerusalem. A great many Jews had already been carried off into exile by Nebuchadnezzar, and Jeremiah counseled them to settle down in Babylon (build houses, plant fields, etc.) and wait for the Lord. Again, this was construed as treachery by the Jewish leaders. Jeremiah was hated by the rulers, and found himself at odds with Kings Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, as well as many of the royal officials.

Jeremiah was in Jerusalem when the walls were breached by the Babylonians. They killed the royal family and took the nobles and the rich off in exile to Babylon. Jeremiah was permitted to stay behind with the poorest of the poor in Jerusalem. When Babylon’s governor in Judah was assassinated, Jeremiah left with the remnant to Egypt, albeit against his will. There he prophesied disaster on those who fled to Egypt for safety and was, once again, hated by those in power.

46-52 | nations | They will come and bind themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten. (50:5b)

The last portion of the book is a collection of prophecies and judgments against the nations that surrounded Judah and interacted with her. By prophesying against the nations of the world, Jeremiah claims that YHWH is the one true God of all the earth. The final chapter of the book is the account of the fall of Jerusalem, similar to what is found at the end of 2 Kings.

Ezekiel | Outline

1-12 | visions | This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. (1:28b)

Ezekiel's prophecy begins with a mysterious vision of God—four living creatures, four wheels, an expanse of ice, and a burning man. Ezekiel's ministry was characterized by dramatic visions and strange object lessons. Like the other writing prophets, much of his prophetic ministry was aimed at condemning Israel and Judah's unfaithfulness to their covenant with YHWH.

In his most dramatic vision, Ezekiel is transported back to Jerusalem (he had been exiled to Babylon in 597 BC) and was shown all the idolatry of the Jews there. After God carried out his judgment against the idolaters, Ezekiel watches as the glory of the Lord departs from the temple.

13-24 | prostitution | How weak-willed you are, declares the Sovereign Lord, when you do all these things, acting like a brazen prostitute! (16:30)

Chapter 16 is a devastating allegory of God's relationship with Israel. He finds her, a newborn baby, cast aside in a field, and he takes her and cleans her and heals her. She grew up and he took her to himself to be his bride and he gave her everything, completely caring for her and providing for all of her needs. But then she turned on him and relentlessly pursued other lovers. She was so insatiable in her desire that she paid her lovers to be with her (rather than the usual fare of a prostitute, which was the other way around), and she paid them with the gifts that God had given her. In the end, God must make atonement for her, and she will be utterly humiliated.

The rest of this section expounds on the theme of rebellious and faithless Israel, calling for her judgment, via the might of Babylon, and yet promising her restoration. Chapter 23 returns to the theme of adultery and prostitution with yet another allegory of the faithless life of Israel.

25-35 | nations | I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of wild beasts so that they may live in the desert and sleep in the forests in safety. (34:25)

Like many of the other writing prophets, particularly Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel devotes a large portion of his book to God's judgment of foreign nations. Ezekiel pronounces judgment against all of Israel's traditional enemies, including Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Egypt, and Edom. Like Israel, however, God's heart is not that they would be completely destroyed, but rather that they would know that he is YHWH. ('You will know that I am YHWH' is the most common phrase in Ezekiel, and is the theological center of his prophecy.) One of the most interesting elements of this nation-judgment section is chapter 28, which, on the surface, is a condemnation of the King of Tyre, but seems to be pointing at someone else—probably Lucifer.

Toward the end of all of this nation-judging, Ezekiel places a chapter about shepherds and sheep, a theme which Jesus (and later, Peter) picks up in the New Testament. God has appointed shepherds (the leaders of Israel) to look after his sheep (the people of Israel), but they have only pursued their own interests. When danger came, they abandoned the sheep and sought to preserve their own lives, instead. God's promise is that he will send another shepherd, a good shepherd, who stands in the line of David, his servant.

36-48 | re-creation | I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. (36:26)

The last fourth of Ezekiel's book is all about re-creation: a new heart, a new spirit, dry bones living, a new temple, a new city, and the return of God's glory. God will undo all the evil and wickedness that Israel has done. He promises a new heart and a new spirit for his people, and he breathes life into the valley of dry bones—they will be born again! He brings Ezekiel to the new temple to which his glory will return, and shows him the new city that will have a new name: 'YHWH Is There'.

Daniel | Outline

1-6 | rescue | If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up. (3:17-18)

Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, are exiles from Judah living in Babylon. They have been summoned to serve Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and they proved themselves exceedingly capable and wise. Over and over again, their lives are threatened because they refuse to worship other gods, but God miraculously rescues them every time. When Nebuchadnezzar is troubled by a dream, he calls all his wise men in to tell him the dream and then interpret—an impossible task! Nebuchadnezzar threatens to kill all the wise men in Babylon (including Daniel and his friends), but Daniel intervenes when God tells him the dream and its interpretation. In the next chapter, Nebuchadnezzar sets up a massive golden idol and commands everyone to worship it, but Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah refuse. They are thrown into the blazing furnace, but come out unharmed because a fourth person—one who looks like a son of the gods—saves them. Finally, after Babylon has been overthrown by the Medio-Persian empire, King Darius issues a decree that forbids everyone to pray to any god for thirty days. When Daniel refuses, he is thrown into the lions' den. But he is saved when an angel of God shuts the mouths of the hungry lions.

7-12 | apocalypse | In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. (7:13-14a)

The last half of Daniel's book is filled with apocalyptic language, similar to what is found in the book of Revelation. The first vision is of the four beasts, which represent four kingdoms. This vision also contains the fascinating picture of the Ancient of Days and 'one like a son of man,' which are crucial images found in the New Testament and used by Jesus. The second vision is of a ram and a goat, which represent the Medio-Persian and Greek empires, respectively. The next apocalyptic vision is of the 'seventy sevens,' which are a prophetic timeline for the appearance of the Messiah. After this, Daniel has a vision of a man who tells him about a great, horrible war that is coming. This war is waged between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids—the Egyptians and the Greeks. The Greek king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, is the one responsible for the 'abomination that causes desolation,' which was an altar to Zeus he set up in the Jewish temple. From the middle of chapter 11 to the end of the book the prophecy moves from the great war to the end times. When speaking of the last days, Daniel is the first prophet to speak of resurrection, which, of course, is a central theme of the New Testament.

Hosea | Outline

1-3 | adultery | Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord. (1:2b)

The first three chapters of Hosea are a prologue to his prophecy against Israel. God calls Hosea to live a very different lifestyle—he is to marry a woman who will cheat on him. His life is to become a living parable for Israel, whom God is accusing of committing adultery.

Hosea has three children: Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah, and Lo-Ammi. Each of these children are a key element of Hosea's prophecy. Jezreel symbolizes the coming judgment of YHWH against the house of Jehu because they have not learned the lesson of the previous monarch, Ahab and his wife Jezebel. (God judged the house of Ahab in the valley of Jezreel.) Lo-Ruhamah means 'not loved', and she symbolizes God's refusal to show love to his people. Lo-Ammi means 'not my people', and is a reversal of the covenant vow, "I will be your God, and you will be my people."

In chapter 2, God promises both judgment and restoration. The first half of the chapter is dedicated to God's message of judgment against idolatrous Israel. They have taken the good gifts he gave them and used them to pursue other gods. They have spurned his love, and now he will spurn them. But he still loves his people, and in the second half of the chapter the tone changes dramatically. He speaks of wooing his lover again, and changing their relationship forever. He will reverse the names of Hosea's children, and he will again love Israel, and they will be his people.

The soap opera concludes with the reconciliation of Hosea and Gomer, and their relationship serves as an example of what God intends to do with Israel.

4-14 | prostitution | Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers his righteousness on you. (10:12)

Chapter 4 returns to the charge against Israel. The setting is a courtroom—a sort of divorce court—and God charges his spouse with unthinkable adultery. They have utterly forsaken him and pursued other gods, namely Baal and his fertility cult. Chapter 5 is the judgment of God against Israel's prostitution. Israel has no case because they are guilty beyond a shadow of doubt, and yet in chapters 6 and 7 they remain unrepentant. In the next three chapters God lays out the punishment for his adulterous people. The courtroom has been set, the charges heard, the verdict given, and the sentence laid out. Israel is guilty of idolatrous adultery, and she will surely be punished.

The last four chapters are framed by God's confession of love for Israel and a promise of blessing if only they would repent. In the midst of the good news, however, is the bad news of Israel's sin and God's anger. Hosea lived to see the fall of Samaria and the total destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel at the hands of Assyria.

Joel | Outline

1-3 | locusts | Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. (2:13)

The time and location of Joel's ministry are unclear. He speaks of an invading army that has come through Israel like a plague of locusts, and they have left the land devastated. But Joel speaks a message of hope, and through him God promises to repay Israel for the years that the locusts have eaten. He also prophesies that, on the day of the Lord, the Spirit of God will be poured out on all people—men and women, young and old, slave and free. This text, 2:28-32, is quoted by Peter on Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples of Jesus.

Amos | Outline

1-9 | justice | Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! (5:23-24)

The words of Amos are harsh and ferocious. He is an angry prophet. His prophecy begins with judgment against foreign nations as he circles in to the true object of his prophetic wrath—Israel. Amos' accusation against Israel is that they do not know how to do good. The rich trample the poor. There is no justice in the courts. The markets are corrupt. All of Israel has forsaken YHWH. In chapter 5 Amos changes his tone, composing a lament for Israel and calling them to repentance. "Seek me and live," he cries out! God is giving the people yet another chance to forsake their wicked ways and pursue him and obey his laws. But Israel is proud and complacent. They are at the height of their wealth under King Jeroboam II, and they imagine themselves blessed by God. But the Lord is measuring his people against a plumb line, and they are certainly crooked. The time is ripe, then, for the dark and dreadful Day of the Lord to sweep over Israel when they will be completely destroyed. Amos does manage to end on a positive note, proclaiming the Lord's decree that he will restore the fortunes of Israel in the future.

Obadiah | Outline

1 | edom | The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head. (15)

Obadiah's short prophecy is against Edom, the descendants of Esau, and distant cousins of the Hebrews. Obadiah condemns them for the way they mistreated the people of Judah and Jerusalem when the city was ransacked. He promises them that they will get their due, and that one day all the land will belong to the Israelites.

Jonah | Outline

1-4 | running | In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry. (2:2)

Jonah's story may be the most familiar of all the prophets. God called him to go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, and tell them to repent. Jonah refused and ran in the complete opposite direction, heading for the other end of the world, Tarshish. While sailing on the Mediterranean Sea, a great storm came up and nearly shipwrecked his boat. When it was determined that Jonah was the cause of the storm, he was thrown overboard and swallowed by a fish. While in the fish, he cried out to God, and the Lord made the fish spit him out on dry ground.

Again Jonah was told to go to Nineveh, and this time he complied. He preached a message of the city, and they obeyed! Because they repented, God spared the city. This infuriated Jonah because he wanted the Assyrians destroyed. But he knew that, because of God's gracious character, he would spare the Assyrians if they repented. The story ends abruptly, with no real sense of closure for Jonah or the Assyrians.

Micah | Outline

1-7 | prophets | 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, to Israel his sin. (3:8)

Micah prophesies against both Judah and Israel, with a particular emphasis on the false prophets found in both nations. Micah seems to have had some serious conflict with those prophets who prophesied falsely. He says of them, "If a liar and deceiver comes and says, 'I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,' he would be just the prophet for this people!" But he does not limit his vitrol to the false prophets, he also condemns the leaders of God's people who are destroying the people and corrupting the nation. Their social and religious institutions have become perverted, and Micah cries out, "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (6:8)

The other major feature of Micah is the large amount of 'good news' and messianic prophecies he proclaims. Most prominently, he predicts the birth location of the messiah: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, through you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." (5:2).

Nahum | Outline

1-3 | nineveh | An attacker advances against you, Nineveh. Guard the fortress, watch the road, brace yourselves, marshal all your strength. (2:1)

Little is known about Nahum, but it is clear that he prophesied sometime after the fall of Thebes (663 BC) and before the fall of Nineveh (612 BC). Unlike many of the other prophets, Nahum deals exclusively with Assyria and its capital city Nineveh. He proclaims the Lord's anger against the Assyrians, and prophesies the fall of their empire. Judah will be spared the fate that overtook her sister Israel, which Assyria had destroyed in 722 BC.

Habakkuk | Outline

1-3 | complaint | For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. (2:14)

The first two chapters of Habakkuk records two of the prophets complaints and YHWH's response to each. His first complaint is that there is no justice in the land. God's answer is that he will raise up Babylon to use as the instrument of his judgment against Judah. The prophet's second complaint concerns the actions of the wicked. God responds by issuing five 'woes' against the wicked. He will surely not leave the guilty unpunished. The complaint-answer section concludes with the definitive answer to all of the prophet's complaints: "But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him." (2:20) The final chapter, a psalm, serves as a prayerful reflection on the words that God has spoken to Habakkuk.

Zephaniah | Outline

1-3 | wrath | "I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth," declares the Lord. (1:2)

Zephaniah is like a man on fire. He rages against Judah and the nations, calling down the wrath of God. He anxiously awaits the great day of the Lord when God will bring all the wicked idolaters to ruin. There is a small glimmer of hope for Jerusalem, as he prophesies redemption through judgment.

Haggai | Outline

1-2 | temple | “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. (2:9)

Haggai prophesied in the last half of 520 BC, less than 20 years after the exiles had returned from Jerusalem. The rebuilding of the temple had begun but been abandoned because all the people were discouraged. Haggai’s message is one of encouragement, serving to motivate the people to stay on the task of rebuilding the temple. And for once, the people actually heeded the words of a prophet.

Zechariah | Outline

1-8 | visions | So 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 Almighty.” (4:6)

The first part of the book of Zechariah reads more like apocalyptic literature—e.g., Daniel and Revelation. He records eight fascinating visions: The man on a red horse; Four horns and four craftsmen; The man with the measuring line; The cleansing of the high priest; The gold lampstand and the two olive trees; The flying scroll; The woman in a basket; and Four chariots. Many of the visions (and much of the rest of the book) have to do with Zerubbabel and Joshua, the governor and high priest of post-exilic Jerusalem.

9-14 | messiah | Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (9:9)

The last half of Zechariah is filled with messianic prophecies. God casts judgment upon the enemies of Israel and assures her that her king is coming and that he himself will appear like lightning. He will care for the house of Judah again, and it will be as though he had never punished them.

Many of these prophecies were dramatically fulfilled by Jesus, including the riding of a donkey on Palm Sunday, Judas’ 30 pieces of silver, mourning for the one they pierced, a cleansing from sin, and living water.

Malachi | Outline

1-4 | conversation | But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. (4:2)

Malachi reads like a conversation between God and his people. He admonishes them and they ask him what they have done to deserve such a rebuke. Each time he answers them, and every answer cuts them to the core of their faithlessness. Although this book was written around 430 BC, its message sounds very similar to the pre-exilic prophets.

