



HMR Men's Neighborhood Bible Study - Prophecy Series

Lesson #11: In-depth Assessment: Major Prophets

Tuesday, June 9, 2020

In our previous study (Lesson #10) we discussed the Minor Prophets. In this week's lesson we will review the four Major Prophets that include Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel. There are five books that make up the Major Prophets section of the Bible as Jeremiah authored a second book, *Lamentations*; the graphic below shows the relationship between these two books. Jeremiah is often recognized as the "weeping prophet" because he observed first-hand the destruction and fall of Jerusalem.



With the recent COVID-19 "pandemic" and energy crisis, along with the general uncertainty that exists in today's world, I have often come to see the modern-Believer in America as a type of prophet. We look and see the destructive behavior of those around us and wonder what can be done. I am sure the prophets of Israel and Judah felt the same way, often experiencing deep frustration in the lack of responsiveness of their fellow citizens.

Provided in **Table 1** is a summary list that includes information on each prophet, the time period during which they wrote, and the focus for their messages. Also, provided below is a brief description of the five books that make up the Major Prophets that include the messages they brought from God to Israel, Judah, and their neighbors.¹

Table 1: A Comparison of the Four Major Prophets²

	Isaiah	Jeremiah	Ezekiel	Daniel
Prophesied To:	Jews in Judea	Jews in Judea and captivity	Jews captive in Babylon	Jews captive in Babylon and Gentile kings
Concerning:	Judah and Jerusalem (Isa. 1:1; 2:1)	Judah and Nations (Jer. 1:5, 9-10; 2:1-2)	The whole house of Israel (Ezek. 2:3-6; 3:4-10, 17)	Israel and Gentile Nations (Dan. 2:36ff; 9)
During the reigns of:	Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah (kings of Judah)	Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah (kings of Judah)	Zedekiah (king of Judah); Nebuchadnezzar (king of Babylon)	Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah (kings of Judah). Nebuchadnezzar (king of Babylon)
Dates:	740-680 B.C.	627-585 B.C.	592-570 B.C.	605-536 B.C.
Historical Setting:	2 Kings 15-21; 2 Chronicles 26-30	2 Kings 22-25	Daniel 1-6	Daniel 1-6

¹ <https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2011/06/tour-of-the-bible-part-4-the-major-prophets/>

² <https://bible.org/seriespage/6-major-prophets>

Isaiah

Of the Major Prophets, Isaiah has arguably had the greatest influence on Jewish and Christian theology. Like many of the prophets, Isaiah delivered a message that few people wanted to hear: God's people had allowed their hearts to grow corrupt, centered around empty religious practices. Isaiah called upon God's people to return to true worship or face judgment. While calls for repentance and warnings of punishment characterize the first half of Isaiah, the second half emphasizes a message of hope and forgiveness.

Isaiah was written before and during the Assyrian invasion and the end of the northern kingdom of Israel (Samaria, the capital, fell in 722 B.C.). Isaiah's call to service from God began in the year King Uzziah died (Isaiah 6:1) and spanned a period of over 40 years through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah.³

Isaiah is a dense book, full of fascinating detail. Because Isaiah interacted directly with several of Judah's kings, this book describes some of the significant moments in the reigns of Ahaz (Isaiah 7) and Hezekiah (Isaiah 37), among other rulers. But Isaiah is most famous for his descriptions of God's Messiah that include passages in Isaiah 9 and 53.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah appeared on the scene about 100 years after Isaiah and prophesied through the reigns of Judah's last five kings. He appealed to the people to forsake their evil ways and return to their true God. Unfortunately his message of coming disaster fell on deaf ears.

Jeremiah is nearly as famous as Isaiah, although for a different reason. Jeremiah was the classic "gloom and doom" prophet who relentlessly confronted Judah about its moral failures and predicted dire consequences if the people did not repent—consequences that unfortunately became reality. Jeremiah was not only ignored by his own people, but actively persecuted for delivering an unpopular message. He lived to see God's judgment fall on Jerusalem—a vindication that filled him with sorrow, not joy.

Lamentations

The book of Lamentations is Jeremiah's song of mourning over Jerusalem's destruction. But to this sorrow is added a ray of hope. While Judah's plight seems overwhelming, Lamentations closes with the hope that God remains sovereign and may restore His people as stated in Lamentations 5:19-22 (HSCB):

You, LORD, are enthroned forever; Your throne endures from generation to generation.
Why have You forgotten us forever, abandoned us for our entire lives?
LORD, restore us to Yourself, so we may return; renew our days as in former times,
unless You have completely rejected us and are intensely angry with us.

Ezekiel

Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel predicted Jerusalem's destruction as a consequence of her sin, but Ezekiel's message was delivered in a very different context than that of his counterpart in Judah. Ezekiel preached in Babylon, the ancient superpower that had conquered much of the ancient Near East. Ezekiel's audience was the band of exiled Israelites who had already been captured and relocated to Babylon.

Ezekiel was among the group of people taken captive in 597 B.C. when King Jehoiachin surrendered Jerusalem to the invading Babylonian army. Ezekiel was a captive in the land of Babylon when God called him to declare a message primarily to "the house of Israel" (Ezekiel 2:3, 7; 3:4, 17). His commission was clear: "Son of man, I have made you a *watchman for the house of Israel*; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me" (3:17, emphasis added throughout).

³ <http://lifehopeandtruth.com/bible/holy-bible/old-testament/the-prophets/the-major-prophets/>

Ezekiel spoke much of God's transcendent holiness. He condemned Israel for turning away from their holy God—but like Isaiah, he had harsh words for some of Israel's pagan neighbors as well. Although God was using Israel's pagan enemies as an instrument of divine judgment, God was not blind to those nations' moral outrages and would visit judgment on them in turn.

But judgment and punishment are not the most memorable themes in the book of Ezekiel. Israel had failed, but God had not forgotten them and would one day restore and redeem them. This hope in an eventual restoration of Israel is vividly portrayed in the famous story of the "valley of dry bones" in Ezekiel 37.

Daniel

Daniel is a Sunday school favorite due to some of his incredible experiences, notably being cast into a fiery furnace and thrown into a den of lions. He interpreted the writing on the wall (the origin of the phrase we use today) and interpreted a king's dreams. Like Ezekiel, he was a captive in Babylon, although God rewarded his faithfulness by elevating him to a position of respect and authority, first with the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar and then with his conqueror, Darius. Although Daniel is best known for the adventures described in the first half of the book, the second half relates a series of visions that emphasize God's sovereignty and faithfulness.

As with the Minor Prophets, many of the prophecies given in the Major Prophets were fulfilled with the fall of the Kingdoms. However, there are numerous prophecies that have yet to be fulfilled. Consider the "Questions for Consideration" below that address some of these prophecies.

Questions for Consideration

1. Read Isaiah 9:6. Who is being described in this passage? What are some of the attributes we read about Him?
2. Read Isaiah 53 in its entirety. Identify at least 10 observations that relate to the life of Jesus and specifically His crucifixion and resurrection.
3. Provided below is a portion of the text from Isaiah 65:17-25. This describes the Thousand Year Reign; it contains a description of events unlike any other in human history. List at least 10 interesting observations in reading verses 17 through 25.

"Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind... I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy... Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years... My chosen will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord..."

4. In Ezekiel 33:11 God states "...I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked but rather that they turn from their ways and live..." How does this text parallel God's message in the New Testament, specifically passages such as John 3:16, John 14:6, and Romans 6:23?
5. Compare Daniel 12:1-3 and Revelation 20:11-14. What do these two passages describe and how can they be used to share the Gospel with non-Believers?