

Prophets in Israel

Pre-Classical Prophets:

Pre-Monarchy → Acted as leaders for Israel, (Moses, Joshua, Deborah)

Post-Monarchy → Acted as Advisors for Kings, (Samuel, Nathan, Elijah)

Classical Prophets:

The classical prophets were men who were chosen to deliver a message from God to the people. They were chosen by God to declare his word to a specific group of people, usually the children of Israel. They were ambassadors, they did not speak for themselves, only on behalf of God.

The Message of the Prophets

The message of the prophets can be summed up in these three statements:

1. You have broken the covenant and need to repent.
2. You have not repented so judgement is coming.
3. Judgement is coming (or has come) but there is hope for the future.

Oracles of the prophets fall into one of four categories:

Indictment → Statement of offense

Judgement → Punishment that will be carried out

Instruction → How the people should respond

Aftermath → Affirmation of hope following judgement

Style of the Prophets

The prophets used a significant amount of figurative language and symbolism throughout their works. They also describe many visions that they have seen. It is important that when reading the prophets that we do not mistake the vision for the message. The visions are the tools for giving the message, not the message themselves (Zechariah 1:8-11).

“Without a doubt, prophetic literature is the most emotional literature in the Bible. The prophets express the deep, deep love of the Lord toward his people and the intense pain he feels as a result of their rejection of him.”¹

¹ Grasping God's Word, Page 370

In the Hebrew Bible

Torah

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

Prophets

Joshua
Judges
I & II Samuel
I & II Kings
Isaiah
Jeremiah
Ezekiel
Book of Twelve (Minor Prophets)

Writings

Ruth
Ezra
Nehemiah
Esther
Wisdom/Poetry
Lamentations
Daniel

ISAIAH

Historical Context

Isaiah prophesied during the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah, about 150 years prior to the Babylonian captivity and 200 years prior to the return from exile.

Overview

Chapters 1-12 → Isaiah's commissioning as a prophet and declaration of judgment on Israel but hope to come.

Chapters 13-27 → Judgement to come on Israel's neighbors, including Babylon

Chapters 28-39 → More judgement on Israel for their faithlessness and pride

Chapters 40-48 → Accusation against God that he is not more powerful than the gods of Babylon is put on trial

Chapters 49-55 → God's ideal servant

Chapters 56-66 → The wicked will be punished, the righteous will inherit the kingdom of God

Message

Servanthood → The book of Isaiah demonstrates Israel's failure to bring the light and message of God to the world, and points to the one who will be God's perfect servant

Texts to know

Isaiah 6, 11, 53

JEREMIAH

Historical Context

Jeremiah prophesied during the reign of Josiah all the way through the Babylonian conquest and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC.

Overview

Chapters 1-25 → Accusation against Israel that they have broken the covenant through idolatry and injustice

Chapters 26-45 → Judgment is going to come, but there is hope for the future

Chapters 46-52 → Judgment on the nations and hope for restoration for Israel

Message

Justice and Grace → Jeremiah wonderfully describes the justice of God in punishing sin and the grace of God poured out on the people

Texts to Know

Jeremiah 7, 25, 29, 30-31

LAMENTATIONS

Historical Context

Lamentations reflects on the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 BC

Overview

Chapter 1 → Acrostic poem that personifies Jerusalem and laments its destruction while recognizing the sinfulness of the people and the Lord's judgement on them

Chapter 2 → Acrostic poem that emphasizes the wrath of God and reminds the reader that it is not random but is the carrying out of His justice and holiness

Chapter 3 → Acrostic poem that focuses on individual suffering in the wake of the destruction of Jerusalem, but also remembers the goodness and mercy of the Lord

Chapter 4 → Acrostic poem that compares the glory days of Jerusalem with the current desolation of the city

Chapter 5 → Poem abandons acrostic style. Emphasizes the plight of the different people in Jerusalem and concludes with a reassuring statement that the Lord reigns forever.

Message

Pain and Grief → The book of Lamentations clearly demonstrates the place of pain and grief in difficult circumstances and points us to the truth that hope is found in the Lord

Texts to Know:

Lamentations 3:19-24, 5:19-22

EZEKIEL

Historical Context

Ezekiel was a prophet to the children of Israel in exile. He was likely taken from the land of Judah in the second exile in 597 BC.

Overview

Chapters 1-24 → Accusations against Israel for their sin and foretelling of the coming judgement on Judah and destruction of Jerusalem and the temple

Chapters 25-32 → Accusations and judgement coming on the nations, especially on the nations of Egypt and Tyre

Chapters 33-48 → These chapters focus on the restoration of Israel, the final victory of God over evil that conclude with a beautiful picture of the new Jerusalem and new life in God.

Message

New Life → Ezekiel does a tremendous job of emphasizing new life that comes from God, just as God breathed life into Adam in the Garden, he breathes life into his people

Texts to Know:

Ezekiel 2-3, 11:17-21, 33, 37

DANIEL

Historical Context

Daniel was a prophet in exile. He was likely taken from the land of Judah during the first exile in 605 BC

Overview

Chapters 1-6 → Narrative accounts of the life of Daniel and his rise to prominence in the Babylonian and Persian Empires

Chapters 7-12 → Series of visions of Daniel and explanations of those visions by angelic beings

Message

Sovereignty and Hope → Daniel's life and visions emphasize the sovereignty of God over the kingdoms of the world and provide hope for all who follow him, for we know that he is in control and will ultimately have the last word.

Texts to know

Daniel 3:16-18, 4:34-37, 6:26-27, 12:13