

PROMISED LAND 2: Lesson Nine,
Introduction to Prophecy and the Fall of Israel
2 Kings 14-17 with Jonah, Joel, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah

Subject: Israel rejected God's Covenant and, as a result, the curses of the covenant came upon them.

Main Idea: The word of God never fails.

Principles:

1. *Trumpeting God's message may be costly, but it must be proclaimed.*
2. *For a period of time, sin may appear to continue without consequences, but eventually, judgment will come.*

Introduction

The more news reports I listen to the more confused I get about what is going on in the world. Reporters and news stations deliver “facts” that favor their bias. They also sometimes make genuine mistakes they must retract. Since I know that I’m quite capable of misjudging situations myself, I suppose I shouldn’t be too hard on them. But how are we to discover what is really true? To what or whom can we look for accurate information? The fracture in viewpoints and philosophies is wider in the United States today than I remember it being in my lifetime, and as a result, people seem more insecure than ever. Where are we to go for reliable information? What can give us true security?

Isaiah 40:6 says, “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.” God’s word is 100% dependable. We might possibly misunderstand it, but as it was originally written, it is entirely without error. If God said it, we can count on it! The word of God never fails. We are nearly two-thirds of the way through the large amount of Old Testament material we are covering in *Promised Land 2*. Although these lessons are more demanding than those in other *GOD of the WORD* studies, we will experience greater security as a result of the time spent, for God’s word is the great constant in our lives.

By way of review, we have learned that Israel asked for kings to rule them. Saul, David, and Solomon ruled over the entire land. Under Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, the people were divided. The ten northern tribes chose to appoint their own king, rather than one of David’s descendants, and over subsequent generations were ruled by several wicked dynasties. They were on a faster track to judgment than the Southern Kingdom of Judah, which had some good kings, as well as evil ones. In the north, King Ahab had led Israel to a new moral low. Meanwhile, God had sent His prophets to warn the kings and people that if they did not repent, His judgment was imminent. 2 Kings 17:13-14 tells us, “The Lord warned Israel and Judah through all His prophets... but they would not listen.” In fact, they generally despised and mistreated the prophets. They looked to themselves, to foreign gods, and to other nations for security, instead of looking to God and to His word, as given through the prophets.

Eventually, Ahab’s descendants were overthrown by Jehu, but Jehu and his descendants were also unfaithful. In this lesson, we pick up the story in the reign of Jeroboam II, one of Jehu’s descendants, and end with fall of the Northern Kingdom under God’s hand of judgment. The last years and fall of Judah will be covered in Lessons 10 and 11. The primary focus of this lesson is the Northern Kingdom of Israel and its prophets.

I. The Classical Prophets and Their Message – Jonah and Joel

A. History of the Prophets

- i. Early Prophets: In the books of Kings, the terms “prophet(s)” and “man of God” (a prophetic title) appear 154 times. Prophecy, in the most general sense, can be traced back to the Book of Genesis. Enoch (Jude 14), Noah (2 Peter 2:5), and Abraham (Genesis 12:8, 20:7) proclaimed the word of the Lord to their generations. However, Samuel was the first to hold the prophetic *office*, a position that arose concurrently with Israel’s monarchy. The books of Kings name Ahijah, Micaiah, Elijah, Elisha, and many others as Samuel’s successors. Those whose messages have not been recorded in a Biblical book that is named for them are sometimes termed “nonliterary” (“non-writing”) or “pre-classical” prophets.
- ii. Classical Prophets: The pre-classical prophets were forerunners of Israel’s “literary” or “classical” prophets, who wrote (or whose prophecies are written in) the sixteen prophetic books in the Old Testament (Lamentation is included with the prophetic books in our Bibles because of its association with Jeremiah, but technically, it is not a book of prophecy). Twelve of these are called “Minor Prophets” because the books bearing their names are shorter. However, their messages are no less significant than those of the four longer prophetic books, called “Major Prophets.” They lived during the 300-year period between the 8th and 5th centuries B.C. (although Joel may belong to the 9th century B.C.).
- iii. Categorization of Classical Prophets: The classical prophets can be subdivided according to the period of history and events that held their attention.
 1. The first group of classical prophets were concerned with the climate in Israel leading up to the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C. These include Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah. Although Jonah does not seem to have focused specifically on Israel’s downfall, his witness to the Assyrians and the fact that he lived in this time period puts him also in this category. Jonah, Amos, and Hosea prophesied to the Northern Kingdom, while Micah and Isaiah prophesied in Judah. The date of Joel is uncertain. His book is included in this introduction to classical prophecy since his message reflects typical prophetic elements and also because his ministry *may* even have pre-dated those in this group.
 2. The second group of classical prophets ministered in the Neo-Babylonian period. They were concerned with the condition leading up to Judah’s fall to Babylon in 586 B.C. and the outcome. These include Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and possibly Obadiah (its date is also uncertain).

3. The third group is comprised of Ezekiel and Daniel. They offered hope to the Jews while they were in Exile.
4. The last group challenged and encouraged those Jews who returned to their homeland after the Exile. These were Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

B. The Prophets' Lives

- i. Trials and Persecution: Just before his death, the first century martyr Stephen accused the Jews: “Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute?” (Acts 7:52). The prophets' lives were difficult. James wrote, “Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord” (5:10-11). The author of Hebrews includes the prophets among those who “faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated – the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and holes in the ground” (11:36-38).
- ii. Calling
 1. The prophets came from a wide variety of backgrounds. Isaiah may have been a relative of the king, while Amos was a shepherd and an orchardist. One thing they all had in common was that God called them into their roles. They were not self-appointed, chosen by the king, or elected by the people. For this reason, there was no power or authority to which they were obligated, except God Himself. Several of the prophets recorded their calls. Isaiah and Ezekiel saw visions of the Lord seated on His throne when the Lord called them (Isaiah 6:1-8, Ezekiel 1:1-2:8). Jeremiah recorded that the Lord reached out and touched his mouth, saying, “I have put my words in your mouth” (Jeremiah 1:9).
 2. Once called, the prophets were *obligated* to deliver God's message. Jeremiah wrote, “But if I say, ‘I will not mention His word or speak anymore in His name,’ His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot” (Jeremiah 20:7-9).
- iii. Jonah's Life and Ministry: The Book of Jonah is a unique book in that it gives us more insight into the *life* of a prophet than into his message.
 1. *Plot*: The story of Jonah centers on a conflict between Jonah and God. Jonah resisted delivering God's message to the Ninevites and fled by boat in the opposite direction. God redirected Jonah by sending a great storm. When Jonah confessed his sin to the ship's crew and they cast him overboard. But the Lord sent a great fish to

swallow Jonah. He remained in the fish for three days and nights, until he repented. Then, God spoke to the fish and caused it to vomit Jonah safely on dry land. Following his rescue, Jonah obeyed and prophesied against Nineveh. His message to them was short and simple: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown” (3:4). Much to Jonah’s disappointment, the Ninevites repented and God showed them mercy. Sadly, the Ninevites’ repentance was not lasting. The Lord overthrew Nineveh for its wickedness 250 to 300 years later in 612 B.C.

2. *Background:* The fact that the Jonah in the book claimed to have been swallowed by a great fish and survived has caused many to suggest that he was merely a mythical figure. However, there is solid evidence to the contrary. According to 2 Kings 14:23-25, Jonah lived in the days of Jeroboam II, king of Israel, and prophesied the restoration of Israel’s borders (since the days of Solomon, Israel had been losing territory to its enemies). Jonah 1:1 identifies him as the same individual who uttered this prophecy, a real historical figure. Second, Jonah presents his narrative in a straightforward manner and gives no suggestion that it is an allegory or tale. Third, Jesus spoke of the repentance of the men of Nineveh as a fact (Matthew 12:41) and compared His own resurrection from the dead to Jonah’s resurrection from the belly of the fish. It is difficult to imagine that Jesus would use a fictitious story to illustrate such an important event. Fourth, the miracles in Jonah are no more spectacular than the miracles that Elijah and Elisha performed. If God created the heavens and the earth, there is no reason to doubt that He can save a man in the belly of a fish or cause a plant to grow up one day and wither the next. Finally, until recent years, neither Jews nor Christians have doubted that Jonah was a real man who was actually swallowed by a fish. Perhaps he was even among the company of prophets trained by Elisha.
3. *Lessons from the Book of Jonah:* The idea of God loving the Ninevites was abhorrent to Jonah. However, God loves and is concerned for pagans. The story also shows God’s willingness to relent on some occasions (as He did in delaying judgment on the Ninevites), and at other times, to force matters (as He did with Jonah). He is sovereign. The book gives us a unique perspective on the personal and very human struggles of a prophet and his relationship with the Lord. Delivering God’s message was often unpleasant. Although the prophets’ obedience wasn’t easy, it was mandatory. This leads us to consider the prophets’ messages.

C. The Prophets' Message

- i. Preaching and Predictive Elements: As we have noted, the prophets were God's spokesmen. In addition to addressing the kings, the classical prophets also addressed the general populace. Although *foretelling* the future was an important part of their ministry, the classical prophets had far *more* to say about the deplorable conditions of the land and the people in Israel (and also outside Israel). For this reason, scholars often speak of prophets as "*forthtellers*" who preached the word of the Lord. Their messages incorporate both elements: preaching and prediction.
- ii. False Prophets: The rise of false prophets in the days leading up to Israel's exile is a telling sign of the people's rejection of the Mosaic Covenant. The Covenant was conditional and had clear terms. To prosper and remain in the land, God's people had to obey Him. If they did not, God would chastise them severely. Moses even foretold exile. However, the Israelites did not want to be reminded of God's warnings, and false prophets arose who told them what they wanted to hear. Deuteronomy 18:20-21 indicates that a true prophet could be recognized by the fulfillment of their predictions. If *anything* they foretold did not come true, they were to be considered false prophets and were to be put to death.
- iii. Authentication of their Message
 1. *Hosea's Message*: While pre-classical prophets like Elijah and Elisha often performed miracles to authenticate their messages, the message of the classical prophets was more likely to be underscored by visions or symbolic behavior. The book of Hosea is a great example of the Lord's message being illustrated symbolically. In Hosea's message, the Lord spoke of Himself as a faithful husband and Israel as His unfaithful wife, an adulteress who had prostituted herself to foreign gods. The message was doubly appropriate since Baal and Asherah worship included sexual rites. The Lord powerfully illustrated this message by telling Hosea to marry a promiscuous woman named Gomer (it is unclear whether she was a prostitute when he married her or simply became an adulterous). Gomer bore him three children. The Lord told Hosea to name the first "Jezreel," because the Lord would soon punish the house of Jehu (Jeroboam II and his son Zechariah) for Jehu's massacre at Jezreel (2 Kings 10:11). At the Lord's instruction, the second child was named "Not Loved," for God said He would no longer show love to Israel (1:6). The third child was called "Not My People," since God was about to reject the Israelites (1:8). After she bore him these children, Gomer returned to her old lifestyle. The Lord told Hosea to go and redeem her from prostitution as a picture of His relentless love for His people. Hosea

prophesied that, in the “last days,” the Israelites would also come back to the Lord trembling and seeking His Davidic King (3:5). Clearly, the symbolism of Hosea’s marriage and family life dramatically underscored the Lord’s message to Israel.

2. Ultimately, the messages of all the prophets were authenticated by the fulfillment of their prophecies. More than any other single event, the Assyrian exile vindicated the prophets and their reputation rose to a new plane of authority and respect. For the Northern Kingdom, it was then too late.
- iv. Themes: Certain predominant themes are repeated in their prophecies:
1. *Idolatry, Social Injustice, and Repentance*: The prophets called the Israelites to repent of two great, overarching evils: idolatry and social oppression. They championed the cause of the poor, while condemning the self-satisfied, complacent wealthy class. God’s Law directed His people to love and help their neighbors, but the Israelites preferred to be free of moral obligation. That is exactly what their idols granted them.
 2. *Judgment and Restoration*: The prophets foresaw a frightening day of doom for the ungodly but also a day of restoration for God’s people. Therefore, while their messages were sometimes difficult to hear, they were also full of hope. Most specifically, they foretold the Israelites’ judgment by exile and dispersion and their later restoration to the land. They also referred very specifically to the coming Messiah, His kingdom, and His reign over the whole earth. These themes of judgment and restoration often appear side-by-side.
 3. *The Covenant*: The prophets not only had the future events in view, they also looked back at the past. The Mosaic Covenant was the all-important backdrop to their message. God had promised to bless and prosper the Israelites, as long as they obeyed Him, but as written in Deuteronomy, “If you do not obey the Lord your God... [He] will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young... They will lay siege to all the cities throughout your land until the high, fortified walls in which you trust fall down... Then the Lord will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other...” (Deuteronomy 28:15, 49-64). Therefore, the basis of God’s judgment was Israel’s failure to keep the Covenant.

v. Interpreting Prophecies

1. *Apocalyptic Literature*: Apocalypse is a Greek term meaning “revelation.” Apocalyptic literature is rich in symbolic language, visions, and conversation with spiritual beings. Daniel and Revelation are two classic examples of apocalypses in the Bible, although a number of the Old Testament prophetic books include portions that are apocalyptic. Apocalyptic material usually deals with future judgment and the establishment of God’s kingdom. Because it contains so much symbolism, portions can be difficult to interpret with absolute certainty. Lesson 13 of this study compares the major viewpoints the Church has historically held about the timeline of these events.

2. *Timing*

- a. Some individuals believe that Old Testament prophets foretold few (if any) events that have not yet been fulfilled. They see fulfillment in Israel’s destruction and exile, in the post-exilic return of some of the Jews, in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and in the establishment of the Church. However, some prophecies are difficult to explain in these contexts and must belong to the time of the second coming of Christ.
- b. It is not uncommon for the Old Testament prophets to have foretold a near-term event *as well as* a more distant one, as though they were one and the same event. Examining such prophecies is sometimes equated to viewing a range of mountains. From a distance, two separate mountains may appear as if they are one. But if we traveled closer, we would find valleys separating them, in this case, valleys of time.
 - i. For example, the prophets foretell the restoration of God’s people. Some of God’s people *were* restored to Israel after the exile, but God’s people today still await a *complete* restoration of the heavens and the earth that will occur one day when Jesus is recognized as Lord of All. In this case, the post-exilic restoration of Jews to Palestine seems to be an *inauguration* of a still-future, more complete fulfillment of the prophecy.
 - ii. Additionally, many prophecies concerning the Messiah and His kingdom were written as though they all concern the same time period. Perhaps, from the viewpoint of the prophets (looking at the events from a distance), they *did* seem as though they would happen concurrently. However, looking at the prophecies from

our viewpoint today, it has become obvious that a “valley of time” existed between the many that were fulfilled in Christ’s first advent and those that will be fulfilled at His second coming.

- vi. The Book of Joel: The Book of Joel is included in this discussion of the prophets’ message because it uses language that is typical of the prophets and contains prophecies that appear to have near-term and distant fulfillments.
1. *Date*: As previously mentioned, the date of Joel is widely debated. However, the oldest modern view, which is still argued by many, places Joel in the reign of Joash, in the 9th century B.C.
 2. *Joel’s Message*
 - a. The theme of Joel is the “Day of the Lord,” the technical phrase used by the prophets to describe coming judgment. Joel speaks of a locust invasion that must have occurred in his day and ravished the land. The invasion left the people joyless. However, Joel used that event to prefigure the invasion and ruin of Israel by a mighty foreign army. He calls for his hearers to repent, promising that those who return to the Lord will find great joy and abundant provision. For those who repent, the Lord will repay “the years the locusts had eaten” (2:25).
 - b. However, Joel’s prophecy did not solely foretell the invasions of Assyria and Babylonia since, according to the Apostle Peter, Joel also described the outpouring of God’s Spirit at Pentecost (Joel 2:28-32, Acts 2:17-21), an event that occurred shortly after Jesus returned to heaven.
 - c. Joel also foretold a time when the Lord will “sit to judge all the nations on every side.” He says a harvest will occur, because the people are ripe for judgment (3:12-13). The New Testament tells us that this event will occur at the end of human history. Jesus used the same harvest analogy for the final Day of Judgment (Matthew 13:39).
 - d. *Apocalyptic Language*: He described cataclysmic heavenly signs immediately after referring to the outpouring of God’s Spirit: “The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and glorious day of the Lord” (2:31). Since this is apocalyptic language, we cannot be surprised that Bible scholars are divided about how to interpret them. Some believe they are metaphors for events that led up to Pentecost or that will lead up to the end of time. Others expect them to be literally fulfilled. The fact that this

description immediately follows that of Pentecost may be explained by seeing the giving of God’s Spirit to believers at Pentecost as the beginning of the end of the age. Although over 2000 years have passed since Pentecost, a thousand years is like a single day by the Lord’s reckoning (2 Peter 3:8).

Summary Statement: The prophets’ lives were often difficult, but they had a message from God that *had* to be proclaimed.

Before Jesus returned to heaven, He commissioned us with a message that we must proclaim (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). Sharing the Gospel may be costly for us, as it was for the apostles and prophets, but each of us has been called by God to this assignment.

Principle: *Trumpeting God’s message may be costly, but it must be proclaimed.*

The Israelites had also been called as the Lord’s witnesses (Exodus 19:6), but they were more concerned with personal comforts and selfish indulgences. Furthermore, years of syncretism had convinced them that they were free to choose which parts of God’s Law they would obey and that they could ignore the rest.

Application: What keeps you from sharing the Gospel? Fear? Busy-ness? Self-preoccupation? We have been commissioned as witnesses. Are we as guilty as the Israelites of choosing which of God’s commands we will obey and which we will not? Will you ask God to help you see the world as He sees it, with His passionate love and concern? Will you even ask Him to help you love the “Ninevites” in your life? As Jonah learned, it is impossible to obey God’s call and do as we please at the same time. We have the word of the Lord, the only message that will lead others to true security. His word never fails.

Transition: To more fully appreciate the prophets and their messages, we must learn more about the context in which they prophesied.

II. EIGHTH CENTURY PROPHETS AND ISRAEL’S FALL – 2 Kings 14-17; Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah

A. Assyria and Israel’s Last Kings – 2 Kings 14-17: Thus far, we have read many Biblical references to the king of Aram and the Arameans. The Aramean states of Syria had been under the control of Solomon but exerted political power in the north at the same time that the Kingdom of Israel divided. In most of 1 and 2 Kings, they were Israel’s most active adversaries. Their primary god was Hadad and Damascus was their capital city. However, it was not ultimately the Arameans but the Assyrians whom God used to bring judgment on Israel.

- i. The Long Reign of Jeroboam II: The Assyrians became a powerful force in the Middle East about the same time as the Arameans. However, at the time of King Jeroboam II of Israel, a decline in Assyrian imperialistic efforts permitted the Israelites much greater political stability. Kings Jeroboam II of Israel and Uzziah of Judah enjoyed long reigns. Jeroboam II reigned 41 years, much longer than any other king of the north. As foretold by Jonah, he extended Israel's northern border back to the boundary of Solomon's day (1 Kings 8:65). Less pressure from Assyria also gave Israel greater economic stability. However, some Israelites prospered at the expense of others, and as a result, classes of rich and poor developed and economic abuses prevailed.
- ii. God's Patience at an End: God had been patient with Israel, but by the reign of Jeroboam II, He finally rejected His people. Two hundred years of rebellion in Israel would soon be judged. Zechariah, son of Jeroboam II, had a short reign. After six months, Shallum assassinated him and succeeded him as king. This fulfilled the Lord's word that Jehu's descendants would sit on the throne to the fourth generation. Shallum ruled for only one month. These two short reigns left Israel unstable at the very time that Assyrian imperialism resurged under the leadership of Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727 B.C.), also known as Pul. Over the next several decades, the Assyrians invaded Palestine repeatedly.
- iii. Israel under Assyrian Domination
 1. *Menahem*: Menahem was Shallum's assassin and successor. He held onto the throne for ten years by paying tribute to Tiglath-Pileser (Pul [2 Kings 15:19-20]). Menahem taxed the people heavily to cover the expense, stressing Israel's economy (2 Kings 15:20). His son Pekahiah succeeded him, but after only two years, he was assassinated by one of his chief officers, Pekah.
 2. *Pekah*: Pekah and the Aramean king, Rezin, allied against Judah. When Ahaz, king of Judah, paid Tiglath-Pileser to help him (an event covered in our next lesson on the last years of Judah), Tiglath-Pileser killed Rezin, took much territory from both Aram and Israel and deported many Arameans and Israelites (2 Kings 15:29, 16:5-9).
 3. *Hoshea*: Israel's last king was Hoshea. During his reign, Shalmaneser V (726-722 B.C.) succeeded Tiglath-Pileser as king of Assyria. He conducted yet another campaign against Israel, and after three years of siege, destroyed Samaria (Israel's capital). Following the Israelites' deportment, little is said in the Bible about Israel's northern tribes, giving rise to the notion of "Ten Lost Tribes."

4. *The Samaritans*: The Assyrians replaced the deported Israelites with people from other conquered lands. The new residents of Israel intermarried with the few remaining Israelites and the new people group became known as *Samaritans*. The Samaritans worshipped Yahweh but mixed true Yahwism with other ideas. The ethnically pure Jews considered them half-breeds and despised them for their claim to and misinterpretation of the Mosaic Law.
5. Although the Southern Kingdom of Judah remained intact for over a century after Israel's fall, Judah was by no means free from Assyrian terror. Assyria conducted two further campaigns into Palestine. Sargon II (721-705 B.C.), successor of Shalmaneser V, came to subdue a revolt in Ashdod (Isaiah 20:1). Later, Sennacherib laid siege to Jerusalem (this event will be covered in the next lesson).

iv. Summary

1. Assyria is considered the arch-villain of Old Testament prophecy. Although the Babylonians captured Jerusalem, the Assyrians had a far greater reputation for brutality. Their “enemies and prisoners were publicly subjected to torture that included flaying, burning alive, amputation of various body parts – including parts of the face – and various other atrocities.”ⁱ These public tortures were used to promote terror. The Assyrians were also the first imperialists known to institute a policy of deportation. This practice was intended to reduce later uprisings in conquered lands. It was not until 612 B.C, after nearly 150 years of domination, that the Assyrian capital of Nineveh finally fell to the Babylonians.
2. The messages of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah were delivered in the context of Israel's ongoing unfaithfulness and the growing Assyrian threat. God used the wicked Assyrians as His instrument of judgment on His own people, but according to 2 Kings 17, the real reason for Israel's downfall was her failure to keep the conditions of the Sinaitic Covenant. In keeping with our goal to understand the “story” of the Bible, only a very short introduction to each prophet is included here. Since each deserves a full treatment, further in-depth study of the prophets at a later time is strongly encouraged.

B. Eighth Century Prophets

i. Amos

1. *Background:* Although Amos was from the Southern Kingdom of Judah, he was sent north to prophecy to Israel. It appears that Bethel (one of the two centers of worship established by Jeroboam I, at which he placed a golden calf) was the place from which Amos preached (Amos 7:10). A local priest condemned Amos for his ominous insistence that Israel would go into exile (7:11). In the days of Jeroboam II, Israel felt secure. Such a future was unimaginable.

2. *Message*

- a. In the first chapters of his book, Amos prophesies against Israel's neighboring nations for their sins. Then, he draws closer to home and condemns Judah for rejecting the law of the Lord and worshipping idols.
- b. Finally, he focuses on Israel. Amos was especially incensed by the social injustice that prevailed. He particularly targeted the wealthy, indulged women of Samaria. His message is that true spirituality will always translate into morality, an echo of the Law of Moses. Like Moses, Amos preached that those who truly love God also love their fellow human beings. Near the end of the book, five visions are recorded that illustrated Israel's ripeness for judgment.
- c. The book ends on a positive note with the promise of restoration. "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when... I will bring my people Israel back from exile... I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them" (9:13-15). The postexilic community experienced a partial fulfillment of this promise. Amos' prophecy that Israel will "never again be uprooted from the land" is one of many Old Testament prophecies about which scholars argue. Some point to a spiritual fulfillment in the establishment of the Church, "the New Israel." Others insist the 1948 granting of statehood to Israel was the fulfillment.

ii. Hosea: Hosea's message has already been discussed. His ministry began where Amos' left off, in the last years of Jeroboam II. After Israel's fall, he apparently returned to Judah.

iii. Micah

1. *Micah's Warning*: Micah prophesied from the Southern Kingdom of Judah concerning both Samaria and Judah around the time of Israel's fall. Although he focused on the capital cities of Samaria and Jerusalem, he warned the people of all the earth that God's judgment awaits (1:2). He railed against social injustice and false prophecy, accusing the leaders of being primarily responsible. But at the same time, Micah's heart was broken and he wept (1:8). We would do well to remember Micah's example in witnessing. We are rarely effective unless those with whom we share know how deeply we care for them.
2. *Message of Hope*: Like the other prophets, Micah also foresaw a time of restoration in the "last days" (4:1), a time in which people of many nations would worship the Lord and want to know His ways. He spoke of it as a time of peace and prosperity: "Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid" (4:3-4). He prophesied that the small, unimportant town of Bethlehem would produce a "ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times" (5:2), a prophecy fulfilled in Jesus' birth (Matthew 2:4-6; Luke 2:1-7).
3. *Israel in the Courtroom*: Micah called Israel to court, to be judged. Creation and history would testify against her (Micah 6). He lamented that, although the Lord was looking for people who acted justly, loved mercy, and walked humbly before him, those things did not characterize God's people (6:8; 7:1-7). In fact, the people of Micah's day persecuted him, but for that, they would be punished (7:8-13). He ended with a prayer to the God who pardons sin and forgives iniquity (7:18-20), asking the Lord for mercy on His people.

iv. Isaiah

1. *The Man*

- a. Isaiah and Micah were peers who both prophesied from Judah, although Isaiah had special influence with Judah's kings, particularly Ahaz and Hezekiah. We will learn about these in the next lesson. Since Israel's fall was near, Isaiah hoped Judah would learn from Israel's example. Like Hosea, the Lord told Isaiah to give his children names with prophetic implications. The name of his firstborn pointed to God's preservation of a faithful remnant. His second son's name announced judgment on Judah's enemies.

- b. Isaiah's call is recorded in the sixth chapter. At that time, he saw a vision of the Lord seated on His throne, surrounded by seraphim calling, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty" (6:3). Isaiah was undone by this vision. In the light of God's presence, his sin was overwhelmingly burdensome (6:5). However, the Lord cleansed him, touching his lips and removing his guilt. He then commissioned Isaiah as His witness (6:6-9).

2. *His Writings*

- a. Most conservative scholars believe that the entire Book of Isaiah belongs to Isaiah. However, a few believe that chapters 40-66 were the work of someone else, largely because these chapters use different language and have a different theme. However, there is no reason why one writer wouldn't address more than one subject and do so using a different style.
- b. The book of Isaiah can be seen as a miniature version of the Bible itself: the Bible has 66 books and Isaiah has 66 chapters. The Bible has two main divisions, the Old Testament with 39 books and the New Testament with 27. Isaiah is likewise divided into two sections, the first with 39 chapters and the second with 27. The first section of Isaiah opens as the Bible opens, by talking about sin. The second part of Isaiah opens with the prediction of John the Baptist, the voice calling, "In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord" (40:3). John's voice introduces Jesus in the New Testament (Mark 1:3). In the very center of Isaiah's second section lies the beautiful chapter 53, that tells of Jesus' suffering for our transgressions. Isaiah also ends as the Bible ends, speaking of the new heavens and earth.

Summary Statement: The prophets' message was one of judgment and mercy, but their message fell on deaf ears. "They would not listen" (2 Kings 17:14) and so, "the Lord removed them from His presence (17:18, 20).

Principle: *For a period of time, sin may appear to continue without consequences, but eventually, judgment will come.*

Some of God’s judgments are those that have been carried out on individuals (Romans 1:18-32) and nations (Isaiah 13-23) throughout history. But as the prophets proclaimed, a future day of terrible judgment is coming. The apostle Peter gave this warning: “In the last days scoffers will come... They will say, ‘Where is this ‘coming’ He promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’ But they deliberately forget that long ago *by God’s word* the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. *By the same word* the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the Day of Judgment and destruction of the ungodly... The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:3-9 [my emphases]).

The word of the Lord said it. It is as good as done. Future judgment is an absolute certainty.

Application: Have you a heart to share the message God has entrusted to us? If many of us are honest, we might have to answer, “Very little.” Will you ask the Lord to give you the heart of Micah, who wept over those facing judgment? Joel prophesied, “Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision” (3:14).

Conclusion

While the word of the Lord assures us that judgment is coming, it also assures us that God is merciful. Micah wrote, “Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of His inheritance?” This is the message we have to declare, the certainty we can give others in our ever-changing, very confused world: judgment awaits but Jesus offers salvation! His word and His promises cannot fail. They are the great constants in our lives. Culture changes, philosophies wax and wane. The “buzz” we hear can leave us so confused. But God’s word is a firm foundation. If He said it, we can believe it.

¹ Hill, Andrew E. and Walton, John H. (1991). *A Survey of the Old Testament* (p. 398). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.