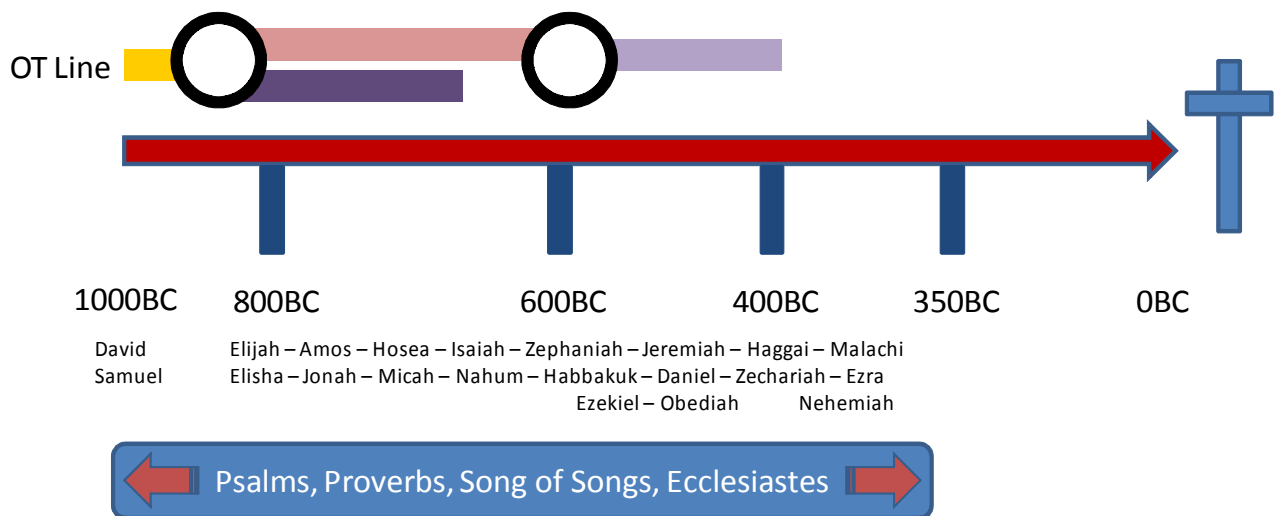


## Session 3: A Kingdom of Poets and Prophets

*(Major & minor prophets, Psalms, Proverbs, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs)*



The Prophets we're going to look at are mainly centred on the period of the divided Kingdom of Israel and afterwards – until around 400BC.

## GOD'S MESSENGERS

Before them, and during the times we've looked at in previous sessions, the people relating God's message to his chosen nation were people like Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, Elijah and Elisha. In fact God had promised a means for His people to hear His voice when they entered The Promised Land back in Deuteronomy.

- **Read Deut 18:14-18** – does this relate to anything we covered in the last session? What is God's plan? (Hint: Exo 20:18-20)

Go, for these nations whom you shall dispossess listen to soothsayers and diviners. But as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you to do so. The Lord your God will raise up for you [a] a prophet (Prophet) from the midst of your brethren like me [Moses]; to him you shall listen. This is what you desired [and asked] of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die. And the Lord said to me, They have well said all that they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet (Prophet) from among their brethren like you, and will put My words in his mouth; and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

[a] Deuteronomy 18:15 The insertion of this promise in connection with the preceding prohibition might warrant the application which some make of it to that order of true prophets whom God commissioned in unbroken succession to instruct, to direct, and warn His people; in this view the gist of it is, "there is no need to consult with diviners and soothsayers, for I shall afford you the benefit of divinely appointed prophets, for judging of whose identity a sure clue is given" (Deut. 18:20, 22). But the prophet here promised was pre-eminently the Messiah, for He alone was "like unto Moses in His mediatorial character; in the peculiar excellence of His ministry; in the number, variety, and magnitude of His miracles; in His close and familiar communion with God; and in His being the author of a new dispensation of religion." This prediction was fulfilled 1,500 years afterwards, and was expressly applied to Christ by Peter (Acts 3:22, 23) and by Stephen (Acts 7:37).

**prophet** – in the Bible, someone who speaks forth openly the message of God

**covenant** – a binding agreement between two parties, each undertaking obligations

The Prophets from Samuel to Elisha mainly concentrate on calling the people of God to be faithful to God's Covenant with them. Following Elisha and Elijah we see a different type of prophet – these have their sayings and messages from God written down, often by other, unknown people. Their key message is one pointing out the repeated failures of the people of Israel and promising judgement. There is the recognition that Israel is incapable of true repentance and that God must do a new work of salvation, going further than before.

## THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

During this period the nation of Israel rises to be a great kingdom under David and Solomon, but begins to disintegrate as sin takes further hold. This eventually **splits the kingdom in two** – North and South – each going their own way (see the tube map!)

Upon the death of Solomon in 931 B.C. the united kingdom of Israel was split with ten northern tribes pulling away and forming their own nation using the name Israel. The two remaining tribes in the south continued under the name of Judah.

	Example Prophets	Example Verse
- NORTH	Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea <i>What is the problem?</i> <i>What is promised?</i>	<i>Amos 2:6-16</i>
- SOUTH	Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah <i>What is the problem?</i> <i>What is promised?</i>	<i>Ezekiel 10:9-10</i>



## NATION IN EXILE

The waywardness of the people finally leads to **judgement and exile** (2 Kings 17:7-23).

During the next 209 years the northern kingdom of Israel continued its worship of idolatry until in 722 B.C. God used the Assyrians as His hammer of judgement. The southern kingdom of Judah continued on for another 134 years after Israel's fall only to be judged for its spiritual adultery by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (2 Chron. 36:17-20).

- **Read Hosea 10:10-11** – what is the crime of Israel? What is going to happen?

When I please I will chastise them, and hostile peoples shall be gathered against them when I shall bind and yoke them for their two transgressions [revolt from the Lord their God and the worship of idols]. Ephraim indeed is a heifer broken in and loving to tread out the grain, but I have [heretofore] spared the beauty of her fair neck. I will now set a rider upon Ephraim and make him to draw; Judah shall plow and Jacob shall break his clods.

*Stuck understanding this verse!? Commentary insights (overleaf) for Bible students:*

**10:10.** At the time of the Lord's choosing (*When I please*) He would **punish** (lit., "discipline"; cf. 5:2) Israel by gathering the **nations . . . against** her. The translation and meaning of the final line in 10:10 are uncertain. The NIV takes the **bonds** as a reference to captivity and approaching exile. Probably a better translation is, "when they are harnessed to **their double sin.**" The imagery is that of plowing (cf. v. 11). Israel is pictured as yoked to her sin like a heifer (cf. Isa. 5:18). As Wolff suggests, "double sin" probably refers to Israel's former sin (at Gibeah) and her present guilt.

**10:11.** The comparison of Israel to a cow is continued (cf. comments on v. 10). Israel (**Ephraim** stands for the Northern Kingdom; see comments on 4:17) was like **a trained heifer that loves to thresh.** A heifer would like to thresh because "threshing was a comparatively light task, made pleasant by the fact that the creature was unmuzzled and free to eat . . . as it pulled the threshing sledge over the gathered corn". However, Israel had abandoned this relatively easy task and had insisted on being yoked, as it were, to sin (cf. 10:10b).

So the Lord would place a different **yoke** on Israel's **neck** and force her to engage in the extremely arduous work of plowing (**so** is better trans. "but"). Even **Judah** was included in this judgment. **Jacob** referred to the Northern Kingdom (cf. 12:2). In this figurative portrayal the nation's threshing corresponded to the service the Lord required within the covenant relationship, whereas the plowing referred to the hardship that would accompany the exile.

This happens to the Northern Kingdom (Israel – capital city: Samaria) – taken by the Assyrians in 722 BC.

- **Read Isaiah 10:10-11** – what is the crime of Jerusalem? What is going to happen?

As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols [which were unable to defend them,] whose graven images were more to be feared and dreaded and more mighty than those of Jerusalem and of Samaria - Shall I not be able to do to Jerusalem and her images as I have done to Samaria and her idols? [says the Assyrian]

So, even having seen God's judgement on Israel the Southern Kingdom (Judah – capital city Jerusalem) continues in it's way until destruction and exile in 597 BC.

God used the Assyrians to accomplish his purposes of judgement against Jerusalem but in turn because of Assyria's pride it also knew God's judgement. In other words, Assyria was the instrument and not above the one who uses it. Does God use people or nations as his 'instruments' today?

## FUTURE PROMISE

But there is still hope. God's promises of blessings for faithfulness to him remain true.

- **Read Lam 3:19-26** – what is the state of the survivors in exile? What are they looking forward to?

[O Lord] remember [earnestly] my affliction and my misery, my wandering and my outcast state, the wormwood and the gall. My soul has them continually in remembrance and is bowed down within me. But this I recall and therefore have I hope and expectation: it is because of the Lord's mercy and loving-kindness that we are not consumed, because His [tender] compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great and abundant is Your stability and faithfulness. The Lord is my portion or share, says my living being (my inner self); therefore will I hope in Him and wait expectantly for Him. The Lord is good to those who wait hopefully and expectantly for Him, to those who seek Him [inquire of and for Him and require Him by right of necessity and on the authority of God's word]. It is good that one should hope in and wait quietly for the salvation (the safety and ease) of the Lord.

- **Read Jer 31:31-35; Isaiah 51:11** – what is promised in the future?

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was their Husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the

house of Israel: After those days, says the Lord, I will put My law within them, and on their hearts will I write it; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And they will no more teach each man his neighbour and each man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they will all know Me [recognize, understand, and be acquainted with Me], from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will [seriously] remember their sin no more. Thus says the Lord, Who gives the sun for a light by day and the fixed order of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, Who stirs up the sea's roaring billows or stills the waves when they roar—the Lord of hosts is His name: [The Lord God says] And the redeemed of the Lord shall return and come with singing to Zion; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

It is important to understand that much of the prophecy in the OT has a two-fold nature. It is meant for both the people that originally heard the message, but it also has a hidden meaning for the future. Let's look at an example from David's time.

- **Read 2 Sam 7:11-13** – which two people could this passage be speaking of?

And as from the time that I appointed judges over My people Israel; and I will cause you to rest from all your enemies. Also the Lord declares to you that He will make for you a house: and when your days are fulfilled and you sleep with your fathers, I will set up after you your offspring who shall be born to you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My [a] Name [and My Presence], and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

[a] 2 Samuel 7:13 "Name" is equivalent to "Me" in II Sam. 7:5. See also footnote on Deut. 12:5.

## LIVING WITH GOD

Alongside the prophets, during the success of the kingdoms of David and Solomon, and through the dark period of the divided kingdom much great literature was produced – often expressing the realities of life with God and the search for meaning. These include Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Job and Ecclesiastes.

- **Read Psalm 93:1-2; 36:5** – can both verses be true? Explain why or why not...

THE LORD reigns, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is robed, He has girded Himself with strength and power; the world also is established, that it cannot be moved. Your throne is established from of old; You are from everlasting.

Your mercy and loving-kindness, O Lord, extend to the skies, and Your faithfulness to the clouds.

- **Read Prov 4:5; Ecc 1:18** – compare these verses? What does this tell us about the Bible?

Get skilful and godly Wisdom, get understanding (discernment, comprehension, and interpretation); do not forget and do not turn back from the words of my mouth.

For in much [human] wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

Despite that all that God has done, human sin still prevents people knowing God as they should. Because of this God is planning a **new way** (Heb 10:20), a New Covenant – hinted at by the prophets.

*For the Bible students...*

*Consider: Isaiah 11:12-13. When the Prince of Peace – Jesus Christ – reigns in His millennial kingdom, all hostility, jealousy, and conflict among the tribes will be put to rest.*

*Consider: 2 Sam 7:14-15. Using the two-fold principle in which some elements of an OT passage find fulfilment in the immediate future, whereas other elements will only be recognised in the distant future, explain these verses when comparing verses 12-13 and Luke 1:31-33.*