



Old Testament Prophets

Prepared by Allen Browne

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1 How to approach the Prophets

Welcome to this overview of the Old Testament prophets: Isaiah to Malachi. These are some of the most fascinating and least understood books in the Bible.

In this series, we'll give some insight into how to approach them, and provide some context for listening to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Minor Prophets. We'll draw some conclusions about how they apply to us, and how they are fulfilled in Christ.

The first step in understanding any Scripture is realizing what God was saying to **them**, so we can understand what God is saying to **us**. So, tonight we'll talk about how to approach the prophets, with questions such as:

- What's a prophet? What kind of message were they delivering?
- What was happening in their time? How do we know? Why does it matter?
- How do the prophets apply to us? Are they being fulfilled in our lifetime?
- How do the prophets apply to Christ? How does he fulfil the prophets?

Then in the next three weeks, we'll look at a Major Prophet each week: **Isaiah**, **Jeremiah**, and **Ezekiel**. We will **not** be covering Lamentations or Daniel: while those two books are placed among the Major Prophets in our Bible, they're categorized as Writings (not Prophets) in the Hebrew text. We did touch on Daniel when we covered the history of the Old Testament.¹

In week 5, we'll look at the setting for the twelve **Minor Prophets** (Hosea – Malachi).

Then in our final week we'll discuss how **Christ** fulfils the Prophets. The New Testament consistently understands the Prophets as fulfilled in the Messiah.

Each week we'll suggest two chapters for you to read. We learn best by listening to the Prophets, not just talking about them.

So here's what you can expect in the next six weeks:

Week	Topic	Reading
1	How to approach the prophets	
2	Isaiah	Isaiah 6, 40
3	Jeremiah	Jeremiah 7, 31
4	Ezekiel	Ezekiel 1, 34
5	The Twelve (minor prophets)	Amos 9; Jonah 4
6	Christ fulfilling the prophets	

Please bring your questions. The *Church Center* app includes a way to message your question, or email me directly: allen.browne@riverviewchurch.com.au

Use whatever translation you're comfortable with. If you're wondering, I mostly use the NIV (*New International Version*, 2011 edition).

How does that sound? Do you have any questions or comments at this point?

¹ On Daniel: notes http://allenbrowne.com/files/figs/FormedInGodsStory_Genesis-Esther_Week6.pdf and podcast https://allenbrowneblog.files.wordpress.com/2023/06/figs_gen-esther_week6_estherdaniel.mp3

Here's how the Middle East from Old Testament times relates to the countries today:



Source: Paul H. Wright, *Rose Then and Now Bible Map Atlas* (Torrance, CA: Rose Publishing, 2012), 16.

1.1 What's a prophet?

A prophet is a person who speaks for God:

- They heard what God was saying, and delivered *the word of the LORD*, or
- they saw *a vision* of what God was doing, and called God's people to follow.

Prophets were not soothsayers predicting the future. Sometimes they spoke of things to come as they described what God was doing, but that wasn't their aim. What defined them was that **they spoke by revelation**: the message God spoke, the vision of where God was leading.

God sent prophets when his people got off track. Israel was God's covenant people, called to live under divine kingship, guided by God's laws and leadership. When they got off track, God would send a prophet to warn, "Turn back! That's heading for disaster. Turn back to the LORD, and walk in his ways. He will lead us and rescue us."

Sometimes the word of the LORD was one of encouragement and comfort rather than warning. God sent the prophets to say, "Keep going! You're on the right path, even though it's tough. Don't give up." Sometimes the message was, "Even though it's all fallen apart, I will rescue you. Even though you were unfaithful to the covenant, I am faithful to you. I will save you."

Those are the general themes, but the message God gave the prophets was quite specific. He sent them to confront a specific diversion from God, or to allay fears of a particular enemy. That's why understanding the circumstances is so crucial to understanding the Prophets.

A couple of Bible scholars put it this way:

You need to know the background information in order to be able to catch the point of much of what a prophet conveys. God's Word came through the prophets to people in *particular situations*. Its value to us depends partly on our ability to appreciate those situations so that we can in turn apply it to our own.²

So how can you know what was going on when a prophet delivered their message? Fee and Stuart wrote another book called, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*. It's a great little survey of all 66 books of the Bible—worth buying from [Koorong](#) or [Kindle](#).

Understanding something of what situation a prophet was addressing will transform how you hear the Prophets.

1.2 How the prophets contribute to the Bible narrative

There's a story that runs through the whole Bible. It's a narrative of reconciliation, of heaven and earth being reunited. But before we get to the end where "they all lived happily ever after," this story has more twists and turns than a spy novel.

The Prophets don't appear in chronological order in this story. To see where they fit in, you'll need to know how the narrative of the Bible works. Here's an overview:

² Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, (Zondervan, 1993), 189–190.

- a) Earth belongs under heaven's reign, but violence took over. God chose Abraham as the family to restore the blessing of his reign (**Genesis**).
- b) God saved Jacob's family, forming them into a kingdom under God through the covenant at Sinai (**Exodus – Deuteronomy**).
- c) Joshua fought for the land for God's kingdom, and the judges fought to keep it (**Joshua – Judges**).
- d) Israel asked for a king to fight their enemies. God gave them his anointed, promising David the kingship forever (**1–2 Samuel**).
- e) The kingdom **split**. Israel (the north) and Judah (the south) had separate kings. They lost it all: Israel fell to Assyria; Judah was exiled to Babylon (**1–2 Kings**).
- f) After the **exile**, some returned and rebuilt when Persia defeated Babylon, but they remained under foreign rule (**Ezra – Esther**).
- g) Hundreds of years later, Jesus rode into Jerusalem hailed as king, but he was rejected—crucified as God's Christ, the king of the Jews. God vindicated him as his Son by raising him up, giving him all authority (**Matthew – John**).
- h) The gospel—the good news that God's Christ is our Lord—is being announced to all the nations of the earth. As his people, we embody his reign. One day, everyone will acknowledge him as Lord (**Acts – Revelation**).

That's the plotline for how earth is restored as a kingdom of heaven, so what God decreed in the beginning is fulfilled in the end.

But in the middle of that story, everything had fallen apart (E and F above). The kingdom split, and both parts fell to the nations. It was in those tragic times that God sent the prophets—messengers of correction and hope, calling God's people back to him.

To be more specific, the kingdom disintegrated in four stages:

- **The divided kingdom:** when Israel split from Judah (920s BC), there were two kingdoms with separate kings in the two capitals (Samaria and Jerusalem). This is the setting of **Hosea, Jonah, Amos, and Nahum**.
- **Judah alone:** after Israel fell to Assyria (722 BC), only Judah was left. This is the setting of **Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk**.
- **In exile:** after Judah fell to Babylon (586 BC), there was no kingdom left. This is the setting of **Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Obadiah**.
- **Post-exile:** after Persia conquered Babylon (539 BC), some returned to rebuild. This is the setting of **Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi**.

So, here's how the prophets fit into that story:

Date	Event	Reign	Prophets
1200s BC	Moses leads the exodus. Joshua takes the Land	The LORD is king	
1040 BC	United kingdom (Saul, David, Solomon)	The LORD's anointed	
920 BC	Kingdom splits: Israel (north), Judah (south)	Separate kings over Israel and Judah	Hosea Jonah Amos Nahum

722 BC	Israel falls to Assyria (Judah alone remains)	Kings of Judah	Isaiah 1-39 Micah Joel? Zephaniah Habakkuk
586 BC	Judah exiled to Babylon (land, temple, and kingship lost)	Babylon	Isaiah 40-66 Jeremiah Ezekiel Obadiah
515 BC	Second temple dedicated: returning from exile	Persia, Greece, Rome	Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
AD 30	Jesus the Christ is raised up with all authority	The LORD's anointed	
The goal	Earth will be fully restored to heaven's reign	The LORD is king	1 Cor 15:24

“The exile” was when Babylon captured Judah (the only part of Israel left). Babylon destroyed the temple, terminated the kingship, and took people to live in Babylon.

1.3 The message of the prophets

When we hear the prophets in their context, their message makes sense. For example:

Isaiah 39:5-6 (NIV)

⁵ Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the LORD Almighty:

⁶ The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your predecessors have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD.”

Isaiah 1–39 was the word of the LORD for Judah as a kingdom. This point is where God reveals that the kingdom will fall, that they’re going into exile.

Isaiah 40–66 then has a completely different context. They’ve gone into exile, so the message is that God will restore them. It begins: “*Comfort, comfort my people,*” says your God (Isaiah 40:1).

The exile to Babylon was the watershed moment in Israel’s history. 39:6 is the watershed moment in Isaiah, dividing the book into two different contexts. Understanding the two contexts is crucial to understanding the Book of Isaiah.

After exile, they remained under foreign rule. Most Jews were still scattered among the nations (the Diaspora). Haggai and Zechariah called them to return to Jerusalem, to rebuild the temple, and to live as the LORD’s people:

Zechariah 1:3 (NIV)

This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Return to me,’ declares the LORD Almighty, ‘and I will return to you,’ says the LORD Almighty.

The word *return* has a double meaning here. God was calling them to literally come back to Jerusalem, and he was calling them to return to his leadership. Their ancestors had strayed from God’s leadership long before Babylon invaded (v. 4). God was offering to resume the covenant relationship with them if they were willing.

That is the main message of the prophets. Fee and Stuart put it like this:

As God's appointed spokesmen, they call Yahweh's people back to their covenant roots, announcing both the curses and blessings for covenant disloyalty or loyalty (see especially Deuteronomy 27–30). The exilic prophets also helped the people through their twofold loss—of the divine presence and of the promised land—thus playing the role of Moses and Joshua in reverse.

Thus the prophets constantly call God's people back to divine realities: They belong to God, God does not belong to them; God has called them into being for his purposes of redeeming what was lost in the Fall and of blessing the nations. At the heart of the prophets' message, therefore, is deep concern that Israel reflect God's character by walking in his ways and keeping covenant with him. At the same time, they are constantly reminded that Yahweh is not a local Israelite deity, but is the sovereign God of the universe—Creator and Sustainer of all things and therefore also sovereign over all the other nations.³

1.4 How do the prophets apply to us?

When we stray from God, the prophets still call us back to faithful life with God, and they do so on the basis of God's faithfulness to us. They call us to reconcile with God, and they promise restored relationship with God. That's a very relevant message.

But there's a difference. Our relationship with God is not on the basis of the Sinai covenant; it's on the basis of a new covenant established in Christ. That means that some of specifics in the prophets' message won't apply to us. For example:

Ezekiel 22:26 (NIV)

Her priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things; they do not distinguish between the holy and the common; they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean; and they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.

The Sinai Law required Israel to eat only kosher food, and to keep the Sabbath. These requirements (along with circumcision as the marker of the covenant people) are not transferred to the new covenant established in Christ. They don't apply to all nations.

How to apply the Sinai Law was a big topic in New Testament times. The Holy Spirit said gentiles were not required to comply with Sinai Law. What the apostles expected of the nations sounds more like the covenant God established with all people than the covenant established with Israel (compare Acts 15:28-29 with Genesis 9:4-9).

Just as the Sinai covenant had established Israel as a nation under God's reign, the prophets said God would make a new covenant to restore his reign to the earth in the Messiah, e.g. Jeremiah 31:31-34; Isaiah 59:20-21; Ezekiel 34:23-25; 37:24-28.

So, as we read the Old Testament, we're always asking:

What's the same for us, and what's different?

³ Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Zondervan, 2002), 171–172.

If we don't do that, we will misapply the prophets. Examples:

- We misuse the prophets when we condemn people for failing to comply with the Sinai covenant, since we're part of a different covenant.
- We misuse the prophets when we condemn politicians for failing to provide God's justice in Australia, since we're part of a different kingdom. (Unlike the kings of Israel and Judah, our politicians are not representing God's reign.)

Did you want to discuss how the prophets apply to us?

1.5 How do the prophets apply to Christ?

God promised the kingship to David forever (2 Samuel 7:8-17). But when Solomon died, most of Israel broke away from Judah as a separate nation. Israel's kings reigned in Samaria, and they worshipped golden calves in Bethel and Dan.

Into this divided kingdom, God sent **Amos**. Amos warned the northern kingdom it would fall because they'd rejected the LORD and his anointed ruler. It would be tragic, but not terminal. In his final address, Amos spoke of a time when God's reign through a descendant of David would be restored:

Amos 9:11, 15 (NIV)

¹¹ "In that day, I will restore David's fallen shelter—I will repair its broken walls and restore its ruins—and will rebuild it as it used to be ...

¹⁵ I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the LORD your God.

In 722 BC, Israel fell, leaving only Judah. Other prophets agreed that God would rescue the northern tribes as his kingdom, with a descendant of David reigning over them:

Isaiah 9:1-7 (NIV)

¹ In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honour Galilee of the nations ...

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.



Zondervan Atlas of the Bible, (Zondervan, 2010), 156

But the kings of Judah misused the power God gave them too. Eventually God sacked them to prevent his shepherds “eating” his flock. That’s what Ezekiel said (34:10).

Once again, God promised that the exile would not be the end. God would restore his people into his reign through an anointed son of David:

Ezekiel 34:23-24 (NIV)

²³ I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd.

²⁴ I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.

At every stage of the story, the prophets repeat the promise that God will provide a descendant of David, his anointed ruler, restoring them to be a kingdom of God.

And that’s what the word *Christ* means: the anointed one, the ruler appointed by God. The *Christ* is the descendant of David who restores heaven’s reign to the earth, just as the prophets said.

It was almost 600 years between the loss of God’s reign (the exile) and the restoration of God’s reign in his Christ. Some despaired. Others speculated about how God would restore his reign. Some imagined God giving the nations what they deserved, crushing their oppressors so God’s nation could rise again. Some imagined God would save them if they were more obedient. But the New Testament gives a different testimony.

God’s Anointed restored God’s reign to the earth not through conquest to defeat evil but by dying at the hands of evil and being raised up by God.

The gospel is God’s announcement that his anointed (the Christ) is in charge (our Lord). That’s *God’s gospel* — the good news God promised through the prophets:

Romans 1:1-5 (my translation)

From Paul, servant of Messiah Jesus, his agent assigned to announce God’s gospel, the message he promised through his prophets in the Old Testament about his Son.

He was the physical descendant of David, named “Son of the divine ruler with power” by the cleansing Spirit when he raised up Messiah Jesus from the dead.

Jesus is therefore our ruler, and we’ve received his favour—appointing us to call all the nations into trusting obedience under his authority.

At the end of the Old Testament, God’s kingdom had not been restored. The main goal of what God had promised through the prophets was only fulfilled in Christ. Ultimately, that’s what the prophets were talking about (2 Peter 1:16-21).

Did you want to discuss how the promises of the Old Testament are ultimately fulfilled in Christ Jesus our Lord?

1.6 Why do the prophets feel cryptic?

It's not just the unfamiliar setting that can make the prophets feel cryptic. It's the way they communicated too: the language they used feels foreign to us.

Language conveys feeling as well as content. "I will always love you," sang Whitney Houston. "I can't stop loving you," sang Ray Chales. But "I have an emotional commitment to you" would not work as a song because it sounds detached, unfeeling.

The Hebrew prophets used poetry when they spoke for God. It makes their message far more gripping, more impactful.

But Hebrew poetry is unfamiliar for us. We're used to songs where the words rhyme at the end of each line. Hebrew poetry uses rhyming ideas: each line has a parallel one, another way to express the same thought or feeling. It's known as **parallelism**.

Here's Jeremiah's report of God calling him to prophetic ministry:

Jeremiah 1:4–5 (NIV)

⁴ The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

⁵ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart;
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

The three lines of verse 5 all say the same thing in parallel ways. It's really helpful: each line helps explain the others.

The parallels are not identical. They're more like brushstrokes building up a picture:

Jeremiah 4:23 (NIV)

²³ I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty;
and at the heavens, and their light was gone.

The *earth* (in the first line) doesn't mean the same thing as the *heavens* (in line two). But both statements together create a picture of a world that's not working right.

Remember when the earth was formless and empty? Isn't that how it was before God established the earth as a realm under heaven (Genesis 1:2)? God's voice shaped it all, declaring "Let there be light!" (Genesis 1:3). But Jeremiah says the light from the heavens has gone. The world isn't working as it should: earth is formless and empty, and the heavens have gone dark.

Jeremiah was not talking about a literal eclipse. The point is that God has not given up on the world that's gone dark. The faithfulness of God in the face of a creation that resists his authority: that's the message of the Prophets.

And ultimately God restores his creation in the Messiah. The story isn't complete until God's anointed restores the authority of heaven to the earth.

See if you recognize the parallel expressions in this verse, the brushstrokes building up an image of God redeeming the earth, restoring it to his management in his Christ:

Isaiah 61:1 (NIV)

¹ The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners ...

That's what Jesus was doing, the promise of the prophets that he was fulfilling (Luke 4:16-21).

In preparation for next week, read Isaiah chapters 6 and 40.

1.7 Resources

There are some blog posts on the OT Prophets at <https://allenbrowne.blog>, such as:

- [How to approach the Prophets](#)
- [How do the Prophets apply to Christ?](#)
- [How do the Prophets apply to us?](#)

This one **book** gives the background on all the Bible's books:

- Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart. *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour*. (Zondervan, 2014).

For excellent **videos** on Bible books and themes, visit the **Bible Project**. Examples:

- Series on the prophets: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/the-prophets/>
- On specific books: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/book-overviews/?type=old>

If you want a straightforward commentary on a specific book of the Bible, choose from **Old Testament for Everyone** series, or **The Bible Speaks Today** series. Examples:

- John Goldingay. *Isaiah for Everyone*. Old Testament for Everyone (SPCK, 2015).
- Christopher J. H. Wright. *The Message of Jeremiah: Grace in the End*. The Bible Speaks Today (Inter-Varsity Press, 2014).

For more detail, consider the New International Commentary on the Old Testament series, or the NIV Application Commentary series. Examples:

- Daniel Isaac Block. *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. (Eerdmans, 1997).
- David W. Baker. *Joel, Obadiah, Malachi*. The NIV Application Commentary. (Zondervan, 2006).

Alternatively, if you just want a commentary that covers the whole bible, check out:

- D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, and G. J. Wenham, (editors). *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. (Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

2 Isaiah

There's gospel joy in Isaiah: the promise of hope and salvation for a fallen people. The New Testament quotes Isaiah more than any other prophet.

Let's start with God calling Isaiah to be a prophet (Chapter 6). We'll spend some time in this chapter since it defines what a prophet is, shows what a prophet did, and gives us insight into the problem Isaiah addressed.

2.1 Isaiah's call (Isaiah 6)

It all started with the death of the Davidic king who had reigned well for 50 years (2 Chronicles 26). What would happen now?

Isaiah 6:1 (NIV)

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.

Wow, that's who has the throne! The undying ruler is seated on the throne, in the royal palace his people had prepared for him in Jerusalem.

Actually, God doesn't fit in the house. Merely *the edge of his robe* fills the temple. It's like Solomon said, "*The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!*" (1 Kings 8:27)

In the most devoted chamber of God's house, the ark was the throne they'd provided for their heavenly sovereign, inviting the God of Israel to sit *enthroned between the cherubim* (Isaiah 37:16; Psalm 80:1). Realistically, the ark was more of a *footstool* on earth for the one who reigns in the heavens (Psalm 132:7; Isaiah 66:1).

As you'd expect, the LORD of heaven's hosts is attended by other-worldly servants who draw attention to his majesty:

Isaiah 6:2-4 (NIV)

² Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

It's his character they comment on. *Holy* means **devoted**. Holy things were set aside (devoted) for specific tasks. *The Holy One of Israel* is the one devoted to Israel. Isaiah loves that name (1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:20; 12:6 ... twenty-six times!) YHWH's devotion to them is the covenant relationship they live in.

But what about the other side of the relationship? How devoted was God's nation to their heavenly sovereign?

Isaiah 6:5-7 (NIV)

⁵ "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

It's the revelation of who God is that makes us aware of our need. Despite our sense of inadequacy and failure, *the Holy One* remains committed to his people. He designed the covenant with provisions to maintain the relationship. God reconciles (atones), enabling his people to speak for him.

That is the point of the covenant relationship. God's nation represents him to the nations, embodying the revelation of the heavenly sovereign in his earthly realm. That's the prophetic calling of God's people.

And that's the specific commission God gave Isaiah:

Isaiah 6:8 (NIV)

⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"
And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

Isaiah now knows his own identity. He's appointed to convey the word of the Holy One of Israel to his nation. He's a spokesman for the throne. That's what a prophet is.

The trouble is that God's people often ignore their heavenly sovereign, with tragic consequences. The King wants his spokesman to know how frustrating this commission is:

Isaiah 6:9-10 (NIV)

⁹ He said, "Go and tell this people:
'Be ever hearing, but never understanding;
be ever seeing, but never perceiving.'
¹⁰ "Make the heart of this people calloused;
make their ears dull and close their eyes.
Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

The more God speaks to them, the less they listen. Every prophet faced this frustration. Including Jesus (Matthew 13:13-15).

Isaiah asks how long he must persist with a commission that feels so pointless. Doing the same thing and expecting a different result is madness. How long do you keep cultivating a land that yields no fruit?

Isaiah 6:11-13 (NIV)

¹¹ Then I said, "For how long, Lord?"
And he answered:
"Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, ¹² until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken.
¹³ "And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land."

In the years ahead, Isaiah saw the devastation of the land. Assyria captured most of it, leaving only Judah. Babylon captured what remained, destroying God's house and cutting off the Davidic kings who represented his reign. They lost everything.

This is the tragic context for Isaiah's prophetic ministry:

- Isaiah 7:17 introduces the **Assyrian** threat. It would have been the end of Judah too if King Hezekiah had not called on the name of the LORD. That story is retold in Isaiah 37–39.
- Isaiah 39:6 introduces the **Babylonian** threat. From Isaiah 40 onwards, God's nation has died and his people are under foreign rule. How will God rescue them and reign over them again? Isaiah 40–66 contain amazing insights into the restoration of God's reign in his anointed.

The commission God gave Isaiah was frustrating, but not hopeless. The nation would fall like a tree, leaving nothing but a stump in the land. But the stump wasn't dead:

The holy seed will be the stump in the land (6:13).

Isaiah later speaks of a branch shooting from the stump. A descendant from David's family will be raised up as God's anointed, restoring heaven's reign to the earth, bringing justice and peace for all people (Isaiah 11).

In the end, Isaiah reveals *the Holy One of Israel* as sovereign over the whole earth, restoring all things (Isaiah 65). The one whom Isaiah saw on the throne of the Jerusalem temple declares, "*Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool*" (66:1).

So, what is a prophet? Isaiah's call tells us: a **prophet** delivers a message from the one who has the throne, calling his people to live under his leadership as the people who make the heavenly sovereign known on the earth.

Isaiah proclaimed the LORD's kingship in frustrating times, as the kingdom disintegrated, and after it fell apart. Those are the TWO contexts for Isaiah's message:

- **Isaiah 1–39** expresses God's kingship in the time of the Divided kingdom (Israel and Judah), during the reign of the kings named in Isaiah 1:1.
- **Isaiah 40–66** expresses God's kingship even when Israel and Judah have both fallen, when God's people were exiled and ruled by foreign powers.

Do you have any questions or comments about the call of Isaiah and the settings of this book? Then we'll zoom out for a high-level survey of the book's contents.

2.2 Isaiah 1–39

Isaiah assumes the covenant relationship between God and Israel: God as heavenly king, and the nation as his kingdom on earth. *The Holy One of Israel* is devoted to them, but they've *turned their backs on him* (Isaiah 1:4) even though God has honoured them as the highest representation of his presence on earth (2:2). God would need to bring them down (3:8) to fulfil his purposes (4:2), since God's vineyard has not provided the flavour God intended his world to produce (5:4).

God called Isaiah (6:8) to tell Israel's kings they were servants of God's authority (7:9). God would bring Assyria to conquer them (8:7), but it's not the end. God would provide the child to restore divine government to earth (9:6), while Assyria would fall (10:5). God would restore his reign through a branch growing from the stump of the Davidic kingship (11:1), revealing the Holy One of Israel among his people (12:6).

God reigns over all the nations of the earth, even the nations that threatened the existence of the Abrahamic project:

- the dominant threat from the north: Babylon (Isaiah 13, 21)
- the surrounding nations: Philistia (14), Moab (15–16), and Aram (17)
- the nations to the south: Ethiopia (18–20) and Egypt (19)
- God's own people whose disobedience threatens God's plans (22)
- the trading port to the north that withstood Babylon for a time: Tyre (23)
- the whole earth that abuses God's provision and programme (24)

Nevertheless, God's purposes will be revealed in his people (25–27), even though their leaders misrepresent God's authority (28), dishonouring God (29–30) by relying on human powers instead (31).

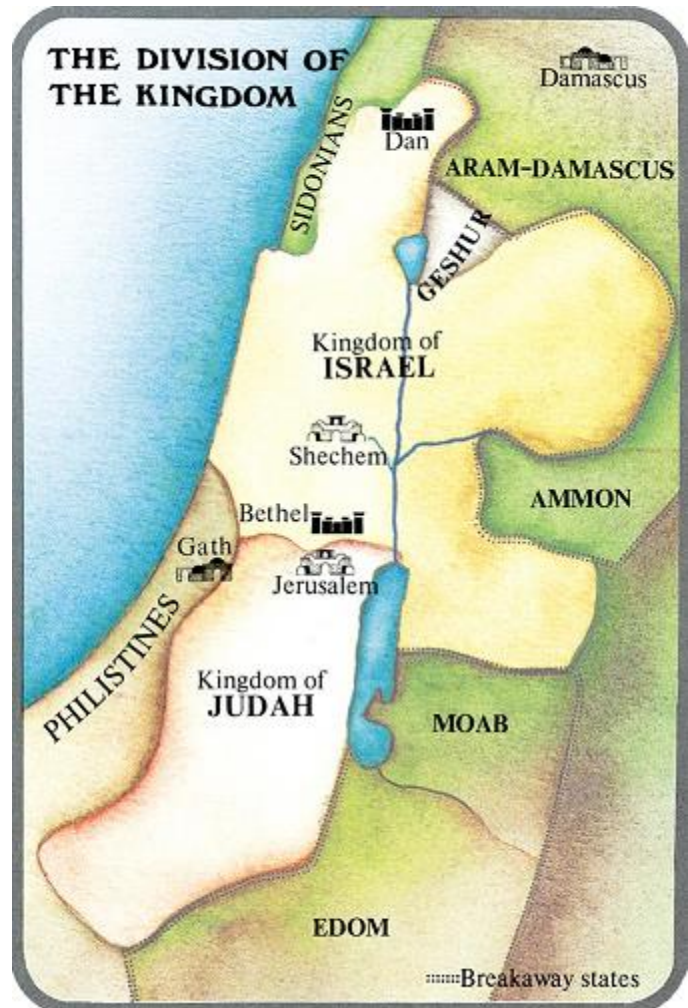
God will still raise up a nation that represents his reign (32), rescuing them from oppression (33), dealing with their oppressors (34), establishing the people who resonate with his song (35).

Those are the warnings and promises of divine kingship in Isaiah 1–35. So how did it work out in practice? Isaiah 36–39 provides a historical interlude (repeating 2 Kings 18–20). Assyria swept through the region, swallowing everything including Israel. Judah survived because King Hezekiah called on the heavenly king for help. But then Hezekiah started relying on Babylon. God warned, "They'll take everything!" (39:6).

The ominous warning that Judah will fall too is the tragic conclusion of Isaiah 1–39.

2.3 Isaiah 40–55

The second part of Isaiah addresses God's people in Babylon, about 170 years after God rescued Hezekiah from Assyria.⁴ Jerusalem and the temple are demolished. There's no longer a land or nation under God's rule: they're living in exile.



F. F. Bruce, *Bible History Atlas* (Carta Jerusalem, 2005), 42.

⁴ Hezekiah was rescued around 712 BC. The events of the second part of Isaiah begin in the 540s BC.

But God had promised that when the Davidic dynasty was chopped down, God would still raise up a king, like a branch growing from the stump. Isaiah had declared that God's anointed would restore the LORD's majestic reign (Isaiah 11).

Well, another prophet now continues the message God gave Isaiah. Good news! The LORD is coming to reign over them!

Isaiah 40:3, 9-11 (NIV)

³ A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD ..."

⁹ You who **bring good news** to Zion, go up on a high mountain.

You who **bring good news** to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"

¹⁰ See, the Sovereign LORD **comes with power**, and he **rules with a mighty arm**. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. ¹¹ **He tends his flock like a shepherd:**

He **gathers** the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently **leads** those that have young.

This is the origin of the word *gospel*. Two centuries before Christ, the Septuagint translators used the Greek word *euangelizō* for Isaiah's statement about *bringing good news*. The *gospel* (according to **Mark 1:1-15**) is the good news that God's anointed (the *Christ*) is restoring God's reign to his people (his *kingdom*).

Isaiah explains that God had called Israel to be his **servant** to the nations (41:8-9), a witness to God's amazing leadership (43:10). In practice, they'd been about as helpful as a blind and deaf servant (42:19). That's why they fell. But God had not given up on them! Astoundingly, the LORD became the **servant to his fallen servant**:

- Devoted to his people, *the holy one of Israel* buys them back — **redeems** them! That's the keyword in Isaiah 41:14; 43:14; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5.
- God's own **arm** reaches and rescues his fallen servant. That's the image in Isaiah 48:14; 50:2; 51:5, 9; 52:10; 53:1; 59:1, 16; 63:5, 12.

Israel had been commissioned as God's light to the nations (42:6; 49:6). They'd fallen, but the nations would see the LORD doing right by his people (*righteousness*)—*saving* them from their oppression (51:4-5). The divine rescue is the *gospel*:

Isaiah 52:7-10 (NIV)

⁷ How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring **good news**, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim **salvation**, who say to Zion, "Your God **reigns!**" ...

¹⁰ The LORD will lay bare his holy **arm** in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the **salvation** of our God.

But how? If God is the servant sovereign who rescues his people rather than smashing his enemies into submission, how?

Isaiah 53:1-11 (NIV)

¹ To whom has the **arm** of the LORD been revealed? ² He grew up before him like a **tender shoot**, and like a **root** out of dry ground. ...

³ He was despised and rejected by mankind, **a man of suffering**, and familiar with pain. ... ⁵ He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. ...

⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away. ... ⁹ He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. ...

¹¹ After he has suffered, he will see the light of life; ... my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

The LORD's *arm* is revealed in the *Branch* who enters into the suffering of his people, their demise, their death. God does not save his people by smashing their enemies into submission. The Branch God promised suffers for and with his suffering people. That's how he is raised up on their behalf, to lead them as God's kingdom. This is the gospel—the good news of God's reign restored to earth in his suffering servant.

In God's anointed (the Christ), the people of God are restored, and the reign of God extends to the nations. That's how God fulfils his covenant with Noah (54:9-10) and with David (55:3) as he calls everyone to seek his kingship (55:6). The fruitfulness God decreed in the beginning is restored as earth comes back under heaven (55:9-13).

Is this how you've heard Isaiah before?

2.4 Isaiah 56–66

The final section of Isaiah maintains this cosmic outlook for all people. Foreigners can participate in God's reign too (56:3). This is an astounding salvation that restores the whole earth under God's reign.

God's nation could not rescue themselves, so the LORD donned his armour and came to save them himself (59:15-20). But God didn't save them by destroying their enemies; God saved his nation by bring the nations under his reign as well.

The violence that has covered the earth since Genesis 4 is subdued as the nations recognize God's reign in his Anointed ruler and his people embody his reign:

Isaiah 59:19 – 60:3 (NIV)

59 ¹⁹ From the west, people will fear the name of the LORD, and from the rising of the sun, they will revere his glory. ... ²⁰ "The Redeemer will come to Zion ...

60 ¹ "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. ... ³ Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

King David had been the LORD's anointed, empowered to restore heaven's reign to the earth. The kingship and the nation had fallen, but God promised to restore his people in his anointed:

Isaiah 61:1 (NIV)

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind

up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners ...

The gospel—according to Luke 4:21—is that this is fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

The Messiah rescues God's people from serving other powers, and **sets right** all that is wrong with the world. These twin themes—*judgement* and *salvation*—dominate the final chapters of Isaiah.

It's in the Christ that earth is restored under heaven, a **new creation** where everything is set right (65:17-19). The relationship between earth and heaven decreed in the beginning is fulfilled in God's gospel proclamation, "*Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool*" (66:1). God's people live under his enduring reign, while those who rejected his kingship do not have a place under his reign (66:22-24).

In preparation for next week, read Jeremiah 7 and 31.

2.5 Resources

Posts at <https://allenbrowne.blog>

- [An overview of Isaiah](#)
- [When God called Isaiah](#) (Isaiah 6)

Books:

- Andrew T. Abernethy. *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom: A Thematic—Theological Approach*. (InterVarsity Press, 2016).
- John Goldingay. *Isaiah*. Understanding the Bible Commentary Series. (Baker Books, 2012).

Videos from Bible Project:

- <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/isaiah/>
- <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/gospel-kingdom/>

New Testament quotations:

Next time you're reading through Isaiah, keep this list alongside you. Each time you come across a verse that's quoted in the New Testament, see what it says. It will take you much longer to read Isaiah, but it's like a Holy Spirit inspired comment on how Christ fulfils the prophets (the topic of the final week in this series).

Prophet	Quotation
Isaiah 1:9	Romans 9:29
Isaiah 6:9-10	Matthew 13:15 Mark 4:12 Luke 8:10
Isaiah 6:9-10	Acts 28:27
Isaiah 6:10	John 12:40
Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:23
Isaiah 8:12	1 Peter 3:14
Isaiah 8:14	Romans 9:33
Isaiah 8:14	1 Peter 2:8
Isaiah 8:17-18	Hebrews 2:13
Isaiah 9:1-2	Matthew 4:16
Isaiah 10:22-23	Romans 9:26

Isaiah 11:10	Romans 15:12
Isaiah 13:10	Matthew 24:29 Mark 13:25
Isaiah 22:13	1 Corinthians 15:32
Isaiah 25:8	1 Corinthians 15:54
Isaiah 27:9	Romans 11:27
Isaiah 28:11-12	1 Corinthians 14:21
Isaiah 28:16	Romans 9:33
Isaiah 28:16	Romans 10:11
Isaiah 28:16	1 Peter 2:6
Isaiah 29:10	Romans 11:8
Isaiah 29:13	Matthew 15:8-9 Mark 7:6-7
Isaiah 29:14	1 Corinthians 1:19
Isaiah 29:16	Romans 9:20
Isaiah 34:4	Matthew 24:29 Mark 13:25
Isaiah 40:3	Matthew 3:3 Mark 1:3 John 1:23
Isaiah 40:3-5	Luke 3:6
Isaiah 40:6-8	1 Peter 1:25
Isaiah 40:13	Romans 11:34
Isaiah 40:13	1 Corinthians 2:16
Isaiah 42:1-4	Matthew 12:21
Isaiah 45:9	Romans 9:20
Isaiah 45:23	Romans 14:11
Isaiah 49:6	Acts 13:47
Isaiah 49:8	2 Corinthians 6:2
Isaiah 52:5	Romans 2:24
Isaiah 52:7	Romans 10:15
Isaiah 52:11	2 Corinthians 6:17
Isaiah 52:15	Romans 15:21
Isaiah 53:1	John 12:38
Isaiah 53:1	Romans 10:16
Isaiah 53:4	Matthew 8:17
Isaiah 53:7-8	Acts 8:33
Isaiah 53:9	1 Peter 2:22
Isaiah 53:12	Luke 22:37
Isaiah 54:13	John 6:45
Isaiah 54:1	Galatians 4:27
Isaiah 55:3	Acts 13:34
Isaiah 56:7	Matthew 21:13 Mark 11:17 Luke 19:46
Isaiah 59:7-8	Romans 3:17
Isaiah 59:20-21	Romans 11:27
Isaiah 61:1-2	Luke 4:19
Isaiah 64:4	1 Corinthians 2:9
Isaiah 65:1	Romans 10:20
Isaiah 65:2	Romans 10:21
Isaiah 66:1-2	Acts 7:50
Isaiah 66:24	Mark 9:48

3 Jeremiah

Last week we surveyed Isaiah. We saw how the exile divided the book into two main parts: before the exile (Isaiah 1–39), and after (Isaiah 40–66). Any questions on Isaiah?

Jeremiah also lived at the time of the exile. In this session we'll look at the most familiar passages from Jeremiah, and set them in context for you. You can then read Jeremiah in the framework. How does that sound?

Jeremiah warned that **Babylon** was coming to invade the city, destroy the temple, and take over the land. As you can imagine he was not popular with Jerusalem's leaders. He spends most of this time banging heads with the authorities in Jerusalem.



Source: *Standard Bible Atlas* (Standard Publishing, 2006), 20.

3.1 The temple (Jeremiah 7)

In Old Testament times God lived among his people (in the temple), not within his people (through the Spirit). Three times a year, they visited God at his house.

So, how could Jerusalem possibly fall? No one was going to defeat God. If God was there, the city was impregnable. If God could not be captured, Jerusalem could not be captured either. In the words of **Psalm 46:4-5**, Jerusalem was *the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall.*

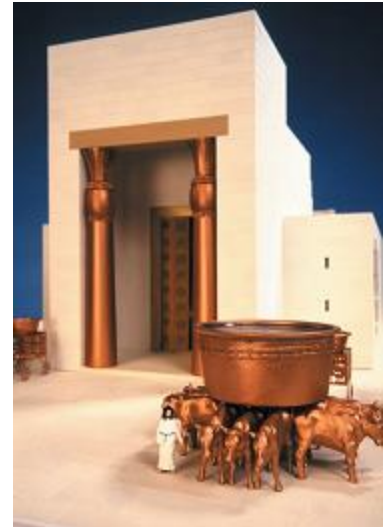
Yet Jeremiah said Jerusalem would fall. It was no longer God's city. God had moved out. The temple was no longer a house inviting God's kingship. It was occupied by bandits robbing God of his authority so they could dominate the people with their own:

Jeremiah 7 (NIV)

⁴ Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is **the temple of the LORD**, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!" ...

⁹ Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, ¹⁰ and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe"—safe to do all these detestable things? ¹¹ Has this house, which bears my Name, become a **den of robbers** to you?

... ¹⁵ I will thrust you from my presence, just as I did all your fellow Israelites, the people of Ephraim.'



Solomon's temple (artist's impression)

Not God's house! A muggers' hangout! The temple was no longer God's house where his servants implemented God's justice for his people. It was occupied by thieves, deceiving the people into serving them. God would not stand for it. Neither would the temple!

They thought God's presence was *in the temple*. Jeremiah inverts that. **The temple was *in God's presence***. If God found it offensive, he could remove it—and the offenders—from this presence (verse 15).

God had already removed Israel (the northern nation) from his presence. He would do the same for Judah. Just as the Assyrian Empire had taken the land of Israel 135 years earlier, the Babylonian Empire would now take what was left. God would *thrust his people from his presence*, sending them into exile in Babylon.

They hated Jeremiah. Instead of heeding the message, they plotted to kill the messenger (11:21).

3.2 The potter (Jeremiah 18)

Jeremiah enacted his prophecy so the people would get the message. He watched a potter shaping a pot that didn't turn out. The potter crushed the clay to make something else:

Jeremiah 18:3-6 (NIV)

³ So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel.

⁴ But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.

⁵ Then the word of the LORD came to me. ⁶ He said, "Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel."



That's not how the leaders were thinking. They thought that since God had made a covenant with Israel, God was stuck with them, regardless of how they turned out. Jeremiah has been talking about the **covenant** relationship (e.g. 11:2, 3, 6, 8, 10; 13:21). But Jeremiah says that God can crush what he formed from the clay and make it into something that pleases him. They can't presume on the covenant relationship for their survival, just as they could not presume on the temple. The covenant contained sanctions for disobedience, including being exiled (e.g. Deuteronomy 28:36, 49, 64). The sanctions also spoke about the possibility return from exile (Deuteronomy 30). The covenant blessings and curses were **conditional** on how they responded:

Jeremiah 18:7-10 (NIV)

⁷ "If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, ⁸ and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.

⁹ And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, ¹⁰ and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it."

Did you see that? Prophecy is not set in stone. It's **conditional**, because it's **relational**.

Christians sometimes get hung up on things like Judas betraying Jesus. They think Judas had no choice because it was prophesied. But prophecy is not like that. Prophecy is not doom regardless; it's God calling us to respond **relationally**.

Remember that first generation that Moses led out of Egypt? They had the capacity to choose not to follow God into the Promised Land. God didn't force them. God reworked his schedule, like a potter reworking the clay.

So, Jeremiah's generation was vulnerable too. **God could smash the kingdom:**

Jeremiah 19 (NIV)

¹ This is what the LORD says: "Go and buy a clay jar from a potter. ...

¹⁰ "Then break the jar while those who go with you are watching, ¹¹ and say to them, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I will smash this nation and this city just as this potter's jar is smashed and cannot be repaired.'"

Did you want to discuss the conditional nature of prophecy?

3.3 Seventy years (Jeremiah 25)

The Potter broke and reshaped the vessel he was making, but he did not give up on his project. For Jeremiah's generation, the exile was a major detour on the way to the kingdom of God, but God was not abdicating.

The LORD reigns over all nations. He even uses his enemies for his purposes:

Jeremiah 25:8-14 (NIV)

⁸ Therefore the LORD Almighty says this: "Because you have not listened to my words, ⁹ I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon," declares the LORD, "and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. ... ¹¹ This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

¹² “But when the **seventy years** are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation ... ¹⁴ They themselves will be enslaved by many nations and great kings; I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.”

In 539 BC, Babylon fell to Persia. King **Cyrus** thought it would be easier to keep his nations happy if he allowed them to return home. He ordered the exiles to **return** to their cities, worship their gods, and live according to their traditional cultures.

Some Jews returned. With help from Persian funds, they built another temple. This second temple was completed and dedicated to the LORD in 515 BC. Babylon had destroyed Solomon's temple in 586 BC. That's Jeremiah's *seventy years*.

3.4 “The plans I have for you” (Jeremiah 29)

This is a favourite verse for many:

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

We gravitate to promises like this because we look for a personal application when we read Scripture. But we need to read Scripture in context.

First, the *you* is **plural**. Jeremiah was addressing the generation being sent into exile. They had to settle down and live the rest of their lives in a foreign country where they did not want to be. They would die in Babylon.

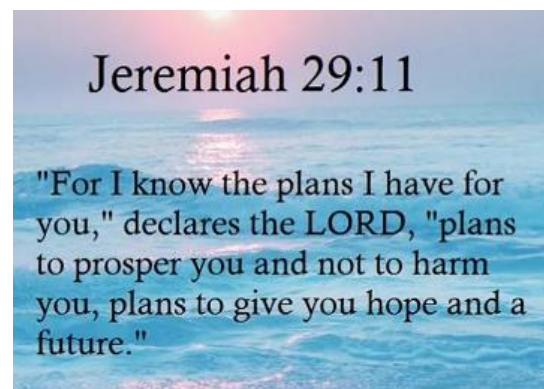
God was not promising them a good life. God was promising to bring their children home and reestablish them as his kingdom. Read the context:

Jeremiah 29:4-11 (NIV)

⁴ This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶ Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. ⁷ Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” ...

¹⁰ This is what the LORD says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

God is not promising me a wonderful life. He's promising us a restored world under his leadership. And he's calling us to participate in representing him now, in the difficult world where we live.



Now that Christ has come, we can see much more than they could. God is restoring the earth as a kingdom of God in his Anointed. We're not there yet; God's plans are still in process. God's reign has been established in Christ, but not everyone recognizes him.

So in a sense, we're still living as *exiles*, scattered among the kingdoms of the world (1 Peter 1:1) as we look forward to *the kingdom of the world becoming the kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah* (Revelation 11:15).

3.5 New covenant, new king (Jeremiah 31)

So, when did God restore the kingdom? When did a descendant of David begin to reign? Jeremiah says God would do that with *a new covenant*.

Here's the Jeremiah passage quoted most in the New Testament:



Jeremiah 31 (NIV)

³¹ “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a **new covenant** with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. ...

³³ “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

The Sinai covenant established Israel as a kingdom of God, when God rescued them from Pharaoh. That kingdom had fallen. They needed a **new exodus** from Babylon, a **new covenant** to re-establish them under God's reign. God promised to re-form them as a kingdom, with hearts willing to follow him.

The new covenant re-establishes divine sovereignty over his people: *They will be my people, and I will be their God* (32:38, compare Exodus 29:45-46).

600 years later, that's what God did in his anointed ruler (his Christ). The Christ established the new covenant not through bloodshed against their enemies, but through his own blood being shed. That's how the NT sees Jeremiah's promise fulfilled (Luke 22:20; Romans 11:27; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Hebrews 8:12; 10:16-17).

It's in the Christ that the kingdom of God is being restored. God gave the kingdom to the anointed son of David by raising him from the dead. Do you recall how Isaiah 11 spoke of the **Branch** sprouting from the dead stump of David's dynasty? Jeremiah uses that imagery too:

Jeremiah 33:14–16 (NIV)

¹⁴ “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. ¹⁵ In those days and at that time I will make a righteous **Branch** sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: **The LORD Our Righteous Saviour.**”

So, Jeremiah's message was simultaneously one of **judgement** and **hope**:

- Jerusalem would fall, for her people had abandoned God.
- God would save his people, for he had not abandoned them.

The *righteousness* of God is his faithfulness to them. God **does right** by his people, even when they did not do right by him. That's how the New Testament describes it:

Romans 3:21-22 (paraphrased)

The **righteousness of God** has been made known not in the Sinai covenant (though the Torah and Prophets bear testimony to God's faithfulness), but in the faithfulness of Messiah Jesus, not just for the Jewish people but for all who give him their trusting allegiance.

That's the gospel in Jeremiah. Anything you'd like to discuss?

3.6 Speaking for the enemy? (Jeremiah 37–40)

The leaders in Jerusalem do not like Jeremiah's message that the kingdom will fall. They treat Jeremiah as a false prophet—speaking not for God, but for Babylon. In their view, he's a deserter, discouraging others from fighting for their nation, their freedom:

Jeremiah 37 (NIV)

⁶ Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet:

⁷ "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the king of Judah ...

⁸ "The Babylonians will return and attack this city; they will capture it and burn it down."

¹² Jeremiah started to leave the city ... ¹³ But when he reached the Benjamin Gate, the captain of the guard ... arrested him and said, "You are deserting to the Babylonians!" ... ¹⁶ Jeremiah was put into a vaulted cell in a dungeon where he remained a long time.

For the Jerusalem authorities, Jeremiah is an enemy to their power:

Jeremiah 38 (NIV)

⁴ Then the officials said to the king, "This man should be put to death. He is discouraging the soldiers who are left in this city, as well as all the people, by the things he is saying to them. This man is not seeking the good of these people but their ruin." ...

⁶ So they took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king's son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah by ropes into the cistern; it had no water in it, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud.

⁷ But Ebed-Melek, a Cushite, an official in the royal palace ... said, ⁹ "My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all they have done to Jeremiah the prophet. They have thrown him into a cistern, where he will starve to death when there is no longer any bread in the city."

Jesus realized Israel's leaders would try to kill him as they had done to previous prophets. He was also announcing the fall of Jerusalem and the temple (Matthew 23:33–14:21). No wonder people thought he sounded like Jeremiah (Matthew 16:14).

But Jeremiah was delivering God's message, not Babylon's. That was evident when Jerusalem fell (Jeremiah 39). So, even the enemy acknowledged Jeremiah as a true prophet:

Jeremiah 40:2-4 (NIV)

² When the commander of the [Babylonian] guard found Jeremiah, he said to him, "The LORD your God decreed this disaster for this place.

³ And now the LORD has brought it about; he has done just as he said he would. All this happened because you people sinned against the LORD and did not obey him. ⁴ But today I am freeing you from the chains on your wrists. Come with me to Babylon, if you like, and I will look after you; but if you do not want to, then don't come. Look, the whole country lies before you; go wherever you please."

How's that for irony? God used Babylon to save Jeremiah from the king of Jerusalem!

Jeremiah says God's sovereign authority was not lost when the kingdom was lost:

- The exile affirms God's authority to sack the kings who misrepresent him, giving the people who refused to live under his authority what they wanted.
- Despite Israel's fall, God is in charge of all nations and the flow of history.

That's the message of the final ten chapters of Jeremiah.

3.7 God's reign when the kingdom is gone (Jeremiah 41–52)

The realization begins to sink in that they've lost the land. This was the land where God's anointed reigned among the nations. This was the land Joshua fought for. This was the Promised Land, the land God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

It's gone. Like a giant game of Snakes and Ladders, they've slid back 700 years to the time before Moses led them to the Land. The leaders and influential people have been taken to Babylon. What should the rest do?

Should they go back to Egypt, relying on Pharaoh to protect them? That's the question they ask Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 42 (NIV)

⁹ He said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel ... says:

¹⁰ 'If you stay in this land, I will build you up and not tear you down ...

¹¹ Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon ...'

¹⁹ "Remnant of Judah, the LORD has told you, '**Do not go to Egypt.**'"

The crucial question is who they **trust**. They're to trust YHWH as their sovereign, able to direct how the king of Babylon treats them. They are not to trust Pharaoh or the political might of Egypt to save them. They'll be saved by faith, if their faith is in the right authority.

But a whole group heads off to Egypt, relying on Egypt's political and spiritual powers for protection:

Jeremiah 43 (NIV)

⁷ So they entered Egypt in disobedience to the LORD ...

¹⁵ Then all the men who knew that their wives were burning incense to other gods ... said to Jeremiah, ¹⁶ “We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD! ... ¹⁸ Ever since we stopped burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have had nothing and have been perishing by sword and famine.”

That is how religion works for many people: I'll serve God if God blesses me. Making God into something to serve me is a dangerous path to disillusionment.

But even those who do not acknowledge God are subject to his sovereign authority. Jeremiah proclaims the LORD's authority over all the nations of the region:

- Egypt (Jeremiah 46)
- Philistia (47)
- Moab (48)
- Ammon, Edom, Syria, Elam (49)
- Babylon (50–51)

Babylon has not taken the world from God. The nation that captured God's people will itself fall, for God has decreed it. Like Assyria before it, Babylon will fall (50:18) because of her arrogance against God's authority (50:31). *At the sound of Babylon's capture the earth will tremble; its cry will resound among the nations (50:46).*

In the short term, it looked like Babylon won. But longer term, the great city of Babylon falls into the dust, while Zion—the city of God's reign—is restored.

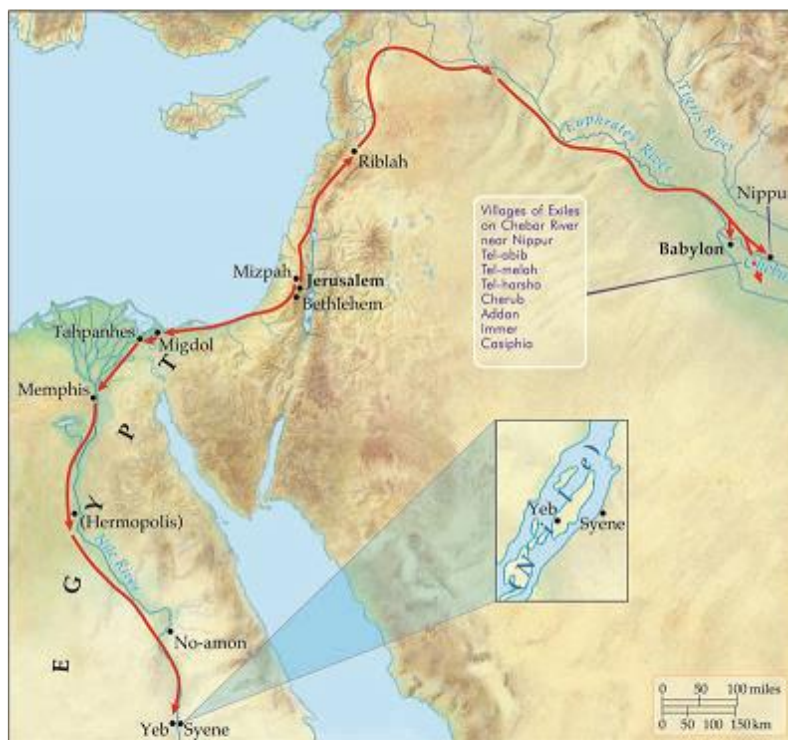
So God calls his people to leave the political systems of the world and cling to the one true ruler of all the earth and all time:

Jeremiah 51 (NIV)

⁶ Flee from Babylon! Run for your lives!
Do not be destroyed because of her sins.
It is time for the LORD's vengeance;
he will repay her what she deserves.

⁷ Babylon was a gold cup in the LORD's hand;
she made the whole earth drunk.
The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad.

⁸ Babylon will suddenly fall and be broken. Wail over her!
Get balm for her pain; perhaps she can be healed.



THE FLIGHT TO EGYPT

CA. 586 BCE

map 8(163-164) chapter 15

THE EXILE FROM JUDAH

597 TO 582 BCE

Source: Paul H. Wright, *Understanding Biblical Kingdoms & Empires: An Introductory Atlas & Comparative View*, (Carta Jerusalem, 2010), 23

⁹ 'We would have healed Babylon, but she cannot be healed; let us leave her and each go to our own land, for her judgment reaches to the skies, it rises as high as the heavens.'

¹⁰ 'The LORD has vindicated us; come, let us tell in Zion what the LORD our God has done.'

Babylon—the kingdom that rose to such power and then sank into the dust—became a symbol for everything that's wrong with the world: the oppressive nature of political power, people trying to dominate each other, disregard for what God decreed for the earth. That's the symbolic use of "Babylon" in the Book of Revelation.

So many of Jeremiah's phrases about Babylon are reused in Revelation 14–18 to describe the utter failure of every other political power that stands in opposition to the authority of earth's true sovereign. Then Revelation 21 goes on to describe the new Jerusalem, the reconstructed seat of the reign of the Lord God and the Lamb who receives all authority and makes all things new.

Like Jeremiah said, the rebellion against God's authority falls to ruins in the end:

Jeremiah 51:37 (NIV)

Babylon will be a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals, an object of horror and scorn, a place where no one lives.

The final chapter of Jeremiah is an addendum not written by the prophet (50:64). It's a historical summary of the fall of Jerusalem, similar to 2 Kings 25.

Any questions on Jeremiah?

In preparation for next week, read Ezekiel 1 and 34.



Babylon Today. <https://history.howstuffworks.com/history-vs-myth/babylon.htm>

3.8 Resources

Posts at <https://allenbrowne.blog>

- [Temple as God's presence](#) (Jeremiah 7)
- [The hands that shape history](#) (Jeremiah 18)
- [The plans I have for you](#) (Jeremiah 29)
- [New covenant, new king](#) (Jeremiah 31)
- [Speaking for the enemy?](#) (Jeremiah 37–40)
- Where is God's reign when the kingdom falls? (Jeremiah 41–52)

Video from Bible Project:

- <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/jeremiah/> (7 minutes)

Commentaries:

- Christopher J. H. Wright. *The Message of Jeremiah: Grace in the End*. The Bible Speaks Today. Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2014.
- John Goldingay. *The Book of Jeremiah*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021.

Verses from Jeremiah quoted in the New Testament:

Prophet	Quotation
Jeremiah 7:11	Matthew 21:13 Mark 11:17 Luke 19:46
Jeremiah 9:24	1 Corinthians 1:32
Jeremiah 9:24	2 Corinthians 10:17
Jeremiah 19:1-13	Matthew 27:10
Jeremiah 31:15	Matthew 2:18
Jeremiah 31:31-34	Hebrews 8:12
Jeremiah 31:33	Hebrews 10:16
Jeremiah 31:33-34	Romans 11:27
Jeremiah 31:34	Hebrews 10:17
Jeremiah 32:6-9	Matthew 27:10
Jeremiah 32:38	2 Corinthians 6:16

4 Ezekiel

Ezekiel may be the least known of the major prophets. People tend to give up at the start, a vision of strange heavenly creatures and *wheels within wheels*. The valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37) is the vision we know best.

Ezekiel was a priest. More than a decade before Jerusalem fell, Ezekiel was taken to Babylon. In captivity, he wrestled with questions about who rules the world, and how the temple could fall if God was there. Was it the end for God's nation? Or did God's people still have a future?

If you've ever faced difficult questions about God—about how things can go so wrong if God is running the world—Ezekiel is a powerfully relevant prophet.

4.1 Who's running the world now? (Ezekiel 1–2)

Sitting among the exiles by a canal in Babylon, Ezekiel has his first vision of God. God sits enthroned in heaven, surrounded by other-worldly creatures.

The vision presents God as:

- **omnipresent** (present everywhere), for his chariot has wheels so he can move in any direction without stopping to turn and change direction (1:15-21)
- **omniscient** (all-knowing), for there are *eyes all around* (1:18)
- **omnipotent** (all-powerful), holding the throne of radiant glory (1:25-28).

What Ezekiel sees is that heaven still reigns over the earth, even though Babylon was taking over Jerusalem. Babylon has not displaced God. God is everywhere—even by the rivers of Babylon. No one sneaks up on God; God sees everything. They haven't captured God's throne; he's still reigning in majesty in the heavens.

But here on earth, things aren't right. There's no longer

a nation representing God's reign. Babylon has taken over. Israel is no longer functioning as God's servant to the nations. Is the Abrahamic project over now?

Ezekiel hears God's call. Listen to how God addresses him:

Ezekiel 2:1-4 (NIV)

¹ He said to me, "Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you." ...³ He said: "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites ...

⁴ Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says.'



Zondervan Atlas of the Bible (Zondervan, 2010), 175.

Ezekiel was a son of Levi (the priestly tribe), but that's not how God addresses him for the temple is falling. Ezekiel was a son of Israel (the nation representing God), but that's not how God addresses him, for the nation is falling. God calls Ezekiel *son of man* (descendant of humanity), for in the beginning humanity was created in God's image to represent his reign (Genesis 1:26-28).

There's no more Abrahamic nation. It's simply as *a human* that Ezekiel serves God. 93 times, the Sovereign LORD calls his servant *son of man* (effectively, "Hey, human!").

And Human serves *Sovereign LORD* (*Adony YHWH*, 217 times in Ezekiel). *Adony* means master or ruler. YHWH is the name God gave to his covenant people at Sinai. *Adony YHWH* is the *Sovereign LORD* (NIV) who reigns not only over Israel but over all the peoples of the earth.

That's Ezekiel's identity: *human servant of Sovereign LORD*.

That was Jesus' identity too. More than 80 times in the Gospels, Jesus referred to himself as *the son of man*.

4.2 The end! (Ezekiel 7–13)

You may have seen strange people wearing a sandwich board that reads, "The end is nigh!" Here's where it comes from:

Ezekiel 7:2-6 (NIV)

² Son of man, this is what the Sovereign LORD says to the land of Israel:

"**The end! The end** has come upon the four corners of the land!

³ **The end** is now upon you ...

⁶ **The end** has come! **The end** has come!"



Ezekiel was not describing the end of the world, but the end of *Israel* (verse 2). Babylon's invasion was the end of their nation. Had God utterly rejected them? (Lamentations 5:22)

Why would God let this happen? Where was God when disaster destroyed them? These questions plague us when everything goes wrong.

Why? Ezekiel's answer is that the covenant people had violated the covenant. They didn't want to serve the LORD, so he gave them what they wanted: to serve another ruler. As a priest, Ezekiel describes how they desecrated God's house, filling it with *things that will drive me far from my sanctuary* (8:6).

Where was God? God wasn't in the temple. He vacated the house where he wasn't welcome. Slowly, as if waiting for them to miss his presence, God had moved out:

Ezekiel 9–11 (NIV)

⁹ ³ Now the glory of the God of Israel **went up** from above the cherubim, where it had been, and moved to the threshold of the temple.

¹⁰ ¹⁸ Then the glory of the LORD **departed** from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim.

11²³ The glory of the LORD **went up** from within the city and stopped above the mountain east of it.

Ezekiel explains that Babylon had not captured God when the temple fell. Babylon captured Jerusalem because God had already left. They'd driven God out, but he had not completely gone. There might still be a future for them if the LORD was hanging around, hovering over the Mount of Olives just east of the temple entry.

4.3 Judgement on God's people (Ezekiel 14–24)

Since the LORD is still running the world, it's ultimately his responsibility to sort it out. That's what **judgement** means: sorting out what's wrong, and setting it right. Those twin themes—judgement, and the subsequent restoration—are Ezekiel's message:

- Judgement starts with God's people (Ezekiel 14–24).
- God sorts out the nations too (Ezekiel 25–32).
- God restores his people into his leadership (Ezekiel 33–39).
- They provide a house for their heavenly sovereign to live among them (40–48).

God says he will deal with their idolatry, their desire to serve someone else (Ezekiel 14).

God deals with their unfaithfulness to him as their covenant partner (Ezekiel 16).

Children always suffer as a consequence of what their parents did, but God promises to bring the next generation back from exile if they will serve him (Ezekiel 18).

The wise sovereign is able to judge who are his:

Ezekiel 20:33-35 (NIV)

³³ As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I will **reign** over you with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath.

³⁴ I will **bring you** from the nations and **gather you** from the countries where you have been scattered—with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath. ³⁵ I will **bring you** into the wilderness of the nations and there, face to face, I will execute **judgment** upon you.

Why would God *execute judgement* on his people? When we hear *judgement*, we tend to think *condemnation*. But God's judgment is his wise discernment, his capacity to evaluate who are his and who are not, to sort the sheep from the goats. God's judgement is crucially important now that his flocks are muddled in exile.

Similarly, God's *anger* is not malice. God feels anger at the way they have turned away from him, but God's anger motives him to separate what cannot be rescued from those who will serve him, the ones he will bring back from exile.

That's why *judgement begins with God's household* before God sorts out the rest of the world (1 Peter 4:17).

God even uses Babylon to sort out his people (Ezekiel 21). Because of their disobedience (22) and unfaithfulness (23), God puts them in the cooking pot (24).

As the servant of the Sovereign LORD who has lost his partner (Israel), Ezekiel has no opportunity to grieve openly when he loses his wife (24:15-27).

4.4 Judgement on the nations (Ezekiel 25–32)

Like God's nation, the nations also need sorting out. Sovereign LORD reigns over all nations, so he asks Human to declare his evaluation of the nations as well.

Specifically, God promises to judge:

- Amon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia—neighbours to the east and south (25)
- Tyre and Sidon—northern neighbours on the Phoenician coast (26–28)
- Egypt—the southern neighbour (29–32).

But what about Babylon? Why is there no mention of judgement on Babylon? Ezekiel says God is using Babylon as the weapon to bring judgement on Israel (17:12-20; 19:9; 21:19-21; 24:2) and on the nations (26:7; 29:18-19; 30:10-25; 32:11).

Of course, Ezekiel is in Babylon. He wouldn't survive long if he openly announced judgement on Babylon. We're probably meant to understand that Babylon—like the other nations that resist God's authority—will eventually face God's judgement too.

If that's right, Ezekiel's rant against the king of Tyre (Ezekiel 28) and his lament for the fall of Pharaoh (Ezekiel 32) stand as warnings for the emperor of Babylon too:

Ezekiel 28:2 (NIV)

Son of man, say to the ruler of Tyre, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'In the pride of your heart you say, "I am a god; I sit on the throne of a god in the heart of the seas." But you are a mere mortal and not a god, though you think you are as wise as a god.'"

No doubt, the king of Tyre was full of himself, as rulers often are. But it was Nebuchadnezzar who took God's people, claiming to rule over them in the LORD's place.

Whether in Tyre, Egypt or Babylon, what's wrong with the world is other powers that claim to be ruling in God's place. That's been the problem since the beginning when humans wanted to be *like God* (Genesis 3:5). But we're not gods; we're mere mortals. Death comes to those who claim to take God's world into their own power:

Ezekiel 28:12-16 (NIV)

¹² Son of man, take up a lament concerning the king of Tyre and say to him: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. ¹³ You were in Eden ...

¹⁴ You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. ...

¹⁵ You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. ¹⁶ ... So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, guardian cherub ..."



The Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World, (Carta Jerusalem, 2014), 265.

That cannot be true of any human individual such as Ethbaal II (king of Tyre), or Nebuchadnezzar (king of Babylon). But it is true of humanity in relation to God.

God made us *like him*, with authority to *rule over* creation (Genesis 1:26-28). We were *crowned with glory and honour, ... rulers over the works of your hands* (Psalm 8:5-6). God commissioned us as *gardeners and guards* of Eden (Genesis 2:15).

We were blameless, until we tried to be *like God*, taking authority reserved for God (*the knowledge of good and evil*). We became mortal, exiled from God's garden, replaced with cherubim entrusted with guarding the divine presence (Genesis 3:24).

Ezekiel sees that same rebellion against God's authority in the rulers of his day. It was true of the king of Tyre. It was also true of the king of Babylon who literally took the mountain of God, claiming to be the ruler over God's land (compare Isaiah 14:3-27).

These verses are often understood as describing Satan (as the serpent in the garden). Ezekiel certainly is describing the power of evil that oppresses God's world, not merely an individual king. But his point is that the human rebellion that began in the garden persists in the violence and oppression we experience in every generation as mortal rulers try to play God, taking God's power into our own hands.

4.5 Restoration of God's people (Ezekiel 33–39)

Ezekiel finally receives the news that Jerusalem has fallen (33:21). This is a hinge point in the book. Now Ezekiel speaks not only of their failure, but of their restoration.

Why did the kingdom fall? Ezekiel holds the **shepherds** of God's people responsible, the kings who used their power to benefit themselves (compare 2 Kings 21:1-16):

Ezekiel 34:2, 10 (NIV)

² "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? ... ¹⁰ This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them.



Babylon invaded because God was rescuing his flock from the kings who misrepresented his authority. But God did not plan to leave them under the king of Babylon:

Ezekiel 34:22-24 (NIV)

²² I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. ²³ I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.

One day, God would save his people, restoring them as his kingdom under a good shepherd, a son of David, God's anointed. Guess who? (Hint: Matthew 1:1.)

In Ezekiel's time, this seemed impossible. Jerusalem was decimated with no defensive walls. The leaders were captives in Babylon. The land was like dead soldiers strewn over a battlefield.

Surely the kingdom could never rise again.

Ezekiel 37:1-5 (NIV)

¹ The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ... ³ He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

I said, "Sovereign LORD, you alone know."

⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!' ⁵ This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones:

I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life."



God promised to raise the graveyard back to life (verses 11-14), resurrecting both Israel and Judah (37:15-23), establishing them as his kingdom under his anointed king, under a new covenant:

Ezekiel 37:24-27 (NIV)

²⁴ "My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. ... ²⁵ David my servant will be their prince forever.

²⁶ I will make a covenant of peace with them ... ²⁷ My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people.

How did God fulfil this promise? When did God restore his kingdom to David's son?

There was this day when God's anointed rode into Jerusalem, recognized as the son of David come to save his people (Matthew 21:1-13). But abusive shepherds were still in power (John 10:7-10). They wanted him dead (Mt 23:30-37; 26:1-4, 63-65). So they handed him over to the rulers of their day (Rome). He entered the graveyard of God's people. The Breath of God entered his dead flesh and bones, raising him to life as the leader restoring heaven's authority to earth (Acts 2:22-38, quoting Psalm 16:8-11). His people are raised to life in him (Ephesians 2:6).

Many Jews today do not accept Jesus as their Messiah, so they do not see this text fulfilled in Christ. Some view the return of Israel to their land after World War II as the resurrection of their nation, the fulfilment of Ezekiel 37. Some Christians agree, especially those who follow Dispensational theology (popular in USA). But the nation of Israel today is not a kingdom with "David" ruling over them. What do you think?

4.6 Restoration of a house for God (Ezekiel 40–48)

The final section of Ezekiel describes the temple to be constructed after the exile, a house to welcome God to live among his people again. A second temple was built and dedicated to the LORD in 515 BC. But the dimensions of Ezekiel's vision in the Hebrew text are enormous, too large for the temple mount. Ezekiel envisaged something more glorious.

Some Dispensationalists and some Jewish sects imagine this temple must still be constructed. It's a very controversial view, since it requires the demolition of the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque that are currently on the Temple Mount.

Not all Jews want a temple rebuilt. Most don't want animal sacrifices reinstated.

And the idea of animal sacrifices does not fit with the New Testament understanding of what God wants. The temple of the Old Testament was merely a shadow representing the reality of God's throne in heaven. The reality came to earth in the person of Jesus (John 2:19-22) who fulfilled everything the temple stood for (Hebrews 8:5; 9:5). God no longer dwells in a stone structure, but in the community that his come to life in King Jesus (Ephesians 2:21), the temple of God's Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Yes, they constructed a second temple after returning from exile. But the glory of the LORD returning to live among his people came to earth in the Messiah.

Do you recall how Ezekiel described the glory of the LORD leaving the first temple (9:3; 10:18; 11:23)? Guess what happens when they build a house that welcomes God's reign over them?

Ezekiel 43:2-4 (NIV)

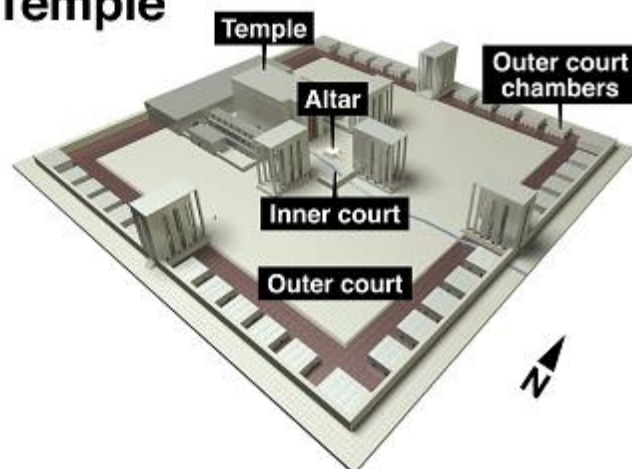
² I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory.

³ The vision I saw was like the vision I had seen when he came to destroy the city and like the visions I had seen by the Kebar River, and I fell facedown. ⁴ The glory of the LORD entered the temple through the gate facing east.

When God's life-giving presence is restored to his people, his people are restored. They were still waiting for this restoration at the end of the Old Testament (Malachi 3:1).

They were still waiting for the *prince* who reintroduces God's reign (Ezekiel 45–46). With echoes of Eden (Genesis 2:10), Ezekiel described the presence of God flowing from the temple like a life-giving river watering the land (Ezekiel 47). The kingdom is restructured around the prince whom God has provided to rule them and the divine presence he represents (Ezekiel 48).

Ezekiel's Temple



Source: Logos Bible Software.

So in the end, Jerusalem is not a city abandoned by God, and his people are no longer exiled from God. The Abrahamic project is back on. The dry bones come to life with God's breath. And the nations see the reign of heaven's king in his people:

Ezekiel 48:35 (NIV)

The name of the city from that time on will be: THE LORD IS THERE.

What a reputation! The new Jerusalem bears the name *YHWH Šāmmāh*. God's people are known for the presence and life of their eternal king.

Anything you'd like to discuss on the Book of Ezekiel?

In preparation for next week, read Amos 9 and Jonah 4.

4.7 Resources

Posts from <https://allenbrowne.blog>

- [The enigma of God's throne](#) (Ezekiel 1)
- [What did Ezekiel mean by "The end is nigh"?](#) (Ezekiel 7)
- ["You were in Eden"](#) (Ezekiel 28)
- [The valley of dry bones](#) (Ezekiel 37)

Video from Bible Project:

- <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/ezekiel/> (2 videos)

Commentaries:

- Christopher J. H. Wright. *The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit*. The Bible Speaks Today. Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001.
- Daniel Isaac Block. *The Book of Ezekiel*. (2 volumes). New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997–1998.

New Testament quotations:

Few verses from Ezekiel are quoted in the New Testament:

Prophet	Quotation
Ezekiel 20:34,41	2 Corinthians 6:17
Ezekiel 36:22	Romans 2:24
Ezekiel 37:27	2 Corinthians 6:16

5 The Twelve (Minor Prophets)

So far, we've surveyed three major prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Any questions before we turn to the Minor Prophets?

The twelve Minor Prophets lived at different times, with messages from God for different groups. They're called *The Book of the Twelve* in the Hebrew Scriptures, since they were short enough to all fit on one scroll.

In our Bible, the Twelve appear in this order:

<i>Book</i>	<i>Addressing</i>	<i>Historic setting</i>	<i>Chaps</i>
Hosea	Israel (North)	Divided kingdom, just before the fall of Israel	14
Joel	Judah	Uncertain	3
Amos	Israel (North)	Divided kingdom, before the fall of Israel	9
Obadiah	Edom	Shortly after Jerusalem fell to Babylon	1
Jonah	Assyria (Nineveh)	Divided kingdom, well before the fall of Israel	4
Micah	Judah	Overlaps with Isaiah	7
Nahum	Assyria (Nineveh)	Divided kingdom, before the fall of Israel	3
Habakkuk	Judah	Shortly before the exile	3
Zephaniah	Judah	King Josiah's time (before the exile)	3
Haggai	Jews	After the return from exile	2
Zechariah	Jews	After the return from exile	14
Malachi	Jews	After the return from exile	4

In this session we'll cover the prophets chronologically in three groups, so you can connect each with its setting:

- The first group is from the time of the **divided kingdom**. After Solomon's death (around 920 BC), Israel and Judah were separate nations until Assyria destroyed Israel (722 BC). In this period, Hosea and Amos addressed Israel (not Judah), while Nahum and Jonah addressed Assyria's capital (Nineveh).
- The prophets to **Judah** were Micah (in the time of the divided kingdom), followed by Zephaniah and Habakkuk after Israel fell (so Judah was all that remained). It's not clear when Joel delivered his message to Judah.
- The final group is from **after the exile** (586 BC). Obadiah addressed Edom. Then Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi addressed the returning exiles after Persia conquered Babylon and allowed the Jews to return.

In summary:

- **To Israel and Assyria:** Hosea, Amos, Nahum, Jonah
- **To Judah:** Micah, Zephaniah, Joel, Habakkuk
- **To the returning exiles:** Obadiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Does that put them in perspective? Any questions?

5.1 To Israel and Assyria (Hosea, Amos, Nahum, Jonah)

The *divided kingdom* is the period after Solomon died (c. 920 BC) until Assyria captured Israel (722 BC). During this time, the word *Israel* refers to the northern kingdom based in Samaria. It doesn't include Judah (the nation based in Jerusalem).

Hosea and Amos delivered God's message to Israel. Since Israel was worshipping golden calves in Bethel and Dan, much of their prophetic message confronted idolatry.

In the same period, Jonah and Nahum delivered God's message regarding Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, Israel's archenemy in 8th century BC.



The Assyrian Empire. Map 9, *Standard Bible Atlas* (2016)

Hosea

Most churches would not employ Hosea. His wife often ran off with other men (Hosea 1:2). His children felt unloved (1:6), and some of them weren't his (1:8).

Those very problems were the reason God chose him. More than most, Hosea understood how God felt. God's covenant partner (Israel) was often running off with other powers instead of staying faithful to the LORD. It wasn't clear which Israelites were God's children (Hosea 2).

Can such a deeply torn relationship be reconciled? Hosea delivers God's message that everything will fall apart. Yet God will still work to restore them into his care:

Hosea 3:4-5 (NIV)

⁴ For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods.

⁵ Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king.

David their king? When Jeroboam declared himself king of Israel and set up golden calves in Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12:16-20), he was rejecting the LORD and his anointed (David's dynasty). Israel persisted in *the sins of Jeroboam* (2 Kings 3:3; 10:19, 31; 13:2, 11 etc). To be saved from their oppression, they need to turn back to the one true God (the LORD) and to his Anointed (David's kingship).

How would this work? After Assyria invaded, foreigners took over Israel (2 Kings 17:24). That's why the later Jews despised these "Samaritans." Some of these tribes had almost no one left after the exile (1 Chronicles 4-8). It would take a miracle of resurrection to raise up both Israel and Judah as a nation under David (Ezekiel 37:15-28).

Hosea calls them to trust God to resurrect their fallen nation:

Hosea 6:2 (NIV)

After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will restore us,
 that we may live in his presence.

It's not clear what *on the third day* refers to in this context of God resurrecting the nation of Israel from its grave. But God's Anointed literally entered into the death of his people, and was raised up on the third day, with his people restored in him.

The New Testament constantly pictures God's Anointed as entering the sufferings of his people in order to save them. For example, Matthew 2:15 quotes this:

Hosea 11:1 (NIV)

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

Hosea was referring back to the exodus. God's son (Israel) had become enslaved again because they were unfaithful (Hosea 11:2). They were still under rulers who kill babies to keep power (Exodus 1:22; Matthew 2:16). Matthew's point is that when God's Anointed fled to Egypt, he was entering into the sufferings of his people in order to save them, to lead the new exodus—out of the reign of evil, into the kingdom of God.

Hosea's final message is God's promise to forgive, heal, and restore his recalcitrant people (Hosea 14).

Amos

Amos knew how to care for sheep. He was a shepherd (Amos 1:1). God sent him as the voice of the Shepherd calling his flock to follow him.

But how do you get the flock to follow? Amos begins by announcing God's judgement on surrounding nations: north-east, south-west, north-west, and south-east (Amos 1). They love the idea of God dealing with their neighbours. Then they realize they're the target—right at the centre of the big X Amos drew on the map (Amos 2).

Amos declares both judgement and rescue for Israel (Amos 3). They don't listen (Amos 4), so the plea becomes more desperate for them to return to the LORD and live under his reign—*the day of the LORD* (Amos 5).

Israel is complacent and self-contained (Amos 6), instead of being true to the LORD (Amos 7). They're a beautiful basket of summer fruit, gradually going rotten (Amos 8).

Amos concludes with the tragic news that Israel will fall. But there's a coda, a footnote promising that God will yet restore them to his reign:

Amos 9:8, 11 (NIV)

⁸ "Surely the eyes of the Sovereign LORD are on the sinful kingdom. I will destroy it from the face of the earth. Yet I will not totally destroy the descendants of Jacob," declares the LORD. ...

¹¹ "In that day I will restore **David's fallen shelter**—I will repair its broken walls and restore its ruins—and will rebuild it as it used to be ..."

David's fallen shelter? Israel had not been under David's reign since Solomon's death. How and when would Israel be restored to God's anointed ruler, a son of David?

What a promise! (Compare Acts 15:15-19.)

Nahum

Just as Hosea and Amos said, the kingdom of Israel fell. Assyria invaded, capturing Samaria in 722 BC.

But what about Assyria? It was the biggest “baddest” empire of the whole Middle East, swallowing nation after nation to expand its kingdom. Should God let this unrestrained violence continue?

No, says Nahum. God will get them too. Nineveh (capital of Assyria) would fall. The city that showed no mercy would receive no mercy. The city that pillaged, plundered and stripped others would herself be pillaged, plundered and stripped, eaten like lions devouring their prey (Nahum 2).

Nahum's final condemnation of Assyria reads like this:

Nahum 3 (NIV)

¹ Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder,
never without victims! ...

⁵ “I am against you,” declares the LORD Almighty. ...

¹⁹ Nothing can heal you; your wound is fatal.

All who hear the news about you clap their hands at your fall,
for who has not felt your endless cruelty?

That's what happened in 612 BC. Nineveh lost its battle against Babylon.

Jonah

The Book of Jonah is also set in the Assyrian Empire, though there's some linguistic evidence that the book may have been written down later (words from a later time).

Jonah is unique. While others denounced foreign kingdoms, Jonah was the only prophet to be sent to another kingdom. He didn't want to go. The book implies that other nations might be more responsive to God than his own people were.

In the first chapter, the pagan sailors seem more responsive than Jonah is. They pray to the LORD (Israel's God) while Jonah is asleep (Jonah 1:7-14).

In the final chapter, Nineveh discovers what Jonah should have known from the Torah: the LORD is *a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in love* (Jonah 4:2; Exodus 34:6). But God's patience angers Jonah! (4:3-4) Many of us are more judgmental than God is (4:10-11).

All this happens when Jonah was literally dying for his disobedience (*sinking to the realm of the dead*, 2:2) until the LORD rescued him (2:7-10). Despite receiving God's mercy, he declared only judgement: *Forty more days, and Nineveh will be overthrown* (3:4). Jonah really did not want God to save their enemy.

More than any other book of the Old Testament, Jonah proclaims the LORD's salvation for the nations. It was the very thing God's people did not want!

That's why Jesus related to Jonah. Jonah embodied the demise of God's people, and the divine rescue of the nations, effectively at the cost of the prophet's own life (compare Matthew 12:39-41; 16:4).

5.2 To Judah (Micah, Zephaniah, Joel, Habakkuk)

We move to the prophets who delivered God's message to Judah.

Micah

Micah lived in Jerusalem during the time of the divided kingdom. He was a contemporary of Isaiah (Micah 1:1, compare Isaiah 1:1). He spoke against injustice in both Israel and Judah (Micah 1), especially their leaders (Micah 3).

Just as Isaiah promised a Branch from David's family who would save God's people (Isaiah 11), Micah also spoke of this king from David's clan, David's town:

Micah 5:2 (NIV)

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though 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.

God's reign in his anointed reconstitutes the world. When the driving force in my life is what's *good for me*, I am cruel and belligerent towards others. But the self is a *mortal*, not a god. The *good* is God (Mark 10:18; Genesis 2:17). Trust God as the *good*, and we *walk humbly before our God*, with *justice and mercy* for each other:

Micah 6:8 (NIV)

⁸ He has shown you, O mortal, 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.

Micah concludes with a plea for God to shepherd his people (7:14), so power-hungry people are shamed like the serpent (7:16-17), so the earth is living faithfully under our heavenly sovereign (7:18-20).

Zephaniah

Zephaniah delivered his message to Judah during the reign of King Josiah (1:1).

Josiah was one of the best kings they ever had, yet he died in a battle with Pharaoh Necho in 609 BC. The kings who followed were appointed by Egypt and then Babylon. Josiah was the last God-anointed king before everything fell apart.

Zephaniah focuses on what it's like when God is king. *The day of the LORD* means when the LORD is reigning. For anyone who was cheating their neighbour that was a scary prospect, but for anyone who had suffered injustice it was a wonderful hope.

The day of the LORD meant that God would sweep from the earth everything that was wrong (Zephaniah 1), both in Jerusalem and among the nations (Zephaniah 2). While that's bad news for those who were doing evil (3:1-8), it's good news for those who wanted God to reign over them:

Zephaniah 3:14-15 (NIV)

¹⁴ Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel!

Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem!

¹⁵ ... The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you;

never again will you fear any harm.

So, when do you think the reign of God was restored to his people? When did God send his Anointed? And how did he restore the kingdom of God?

Joel

Unlike Micah and Zephaniah, Joel's prophecy is undated. All we know is that a locust plague had destroyed all the crops (Joel 1:4). That happens regularly in any agricultural community.

The locusts are described as an army:

Joel 2:7 (NIV)

They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers.
They all march in line, not swerving from their course.

That may be merely a poetic comparison. Or Joel may be introducing a literal army attacking Jerusalem. If so, the army of locusts might represent Babylon. Either way, Joel was calling Judah to turn back to God (2:12-17), promising that God would ultimately save them, restore them, and rule over them (2:18-27).

God's reign (*the day of the LORD*) would be a new era with every person is empowered with God's Spirit (compare Acts 2:16-21):

Joel 2:28-32 (NIV)

²⁸ "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.

²⁹ Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days. ...

³² And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved ..."

Once again, this *day of the LORD* means that God will both sort out everything that's wrong and restore everything that's right (Joel 3).

Habakkuk

Habakkuk complains that God needs to deal with the injustice his people perpetrated on each other (Habakkuk 1:1-4). "I will," says God. "I will bring Babylon, that destructive empire, against them" (1:5-11).

"How does that solve anything?" Habakkuk asks. "Babylon is even worse!" (1:12-17).

God answers, "Tell them, so that those who believe it can run" (paraphrasing 2:2-3). In this way, *the righteous person will live by their faith[fulness]* (2:4). The New Testament has quite a bit on what this means (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). Habakkuk says God will deal with the evil empire (Babylon) also (2:4-19).

In his final chapter, Habakkuk stops complaining against God. He takes a posture of submission and prayer, convinced the LORD will sort everything out in the end (Hab. 3).

Do you have questions or thoughts regarding the prophets to Judah?

5.3 After the exile (Obadiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)

After Jerusalem fell to Babylon (586 BC), Obadiah addressed Edom. Then when Persia conquered Babylon (539 BC), Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi addressed the Jews who were now permitted to return to rebuild Jerusalem.

Obadiah

Obadiah's brief message is a warning for Edom, the country southeast of the Dead Sea. He warned them not to try to take the land of Israel now its people had gone into exile.

The Edomites were descendants of Esau. Remember how Jacob cheated Esau out of his birthright? (Genesis 27–28) Perhaps Esau's descendants saw an opportunity to finally get the blessing. Their attitude serves as a warning for *all nations* (verses 15-21).

Haggai

Under Darius (king of Persia), the Jews in exile were allowed to return and rebuild. But with everything in ruins, reconstruction felt overwhelming. Haggai and Zechariah worked together (Ezra 6:14), encouraging them to build another temple:

Haggai 1:1, 4 (NIV)

¹ In the second year of King Darius ... the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest ...

⁴ "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"

In 515 BC, they completed the second temple, anointing Joshua as high priest. Zerubbabel was a descendant of David, but he could not be anointed as king since Persia was ruling them.

That means the second temple was only partly functional. It was a palace for their heavenly king. God's private chamber held his throne—the ark where God sat *enthroned between the cherubim* (Isaiah 37:16; Psalm 80:1; 99:1 etc). But the ark was gone (Jeremiah 3:16).

God's reign had not been restored. God needed to dislodge the nations and take his place as ruler of his people so the world would be at peace:

Haggai 2:6-9 (NIV)

⁶ "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land.

⁷ I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty. ...

⁹ '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."

Haggai closes with God's anointed still waiting to receive the throne, still waiting to represent God's reign on earth (Haggai 2:21-23). At the end of the Old Testament, they were still waiting for the LORD to come and take his throne (Malachi 3:1).

Zechariah

Zechariah is also about the restoration of God's reign. He told the exiles if they would return to live as God's people, their heavenly sovereign would return to them:

Zechariah 1:3 (NIV)

"Return to me," declares the LORD Almighty, "and I will return to you."

Zechariah sees two olive trees (anointed leaders) supporting the lamp of God's reign (4:2-3). One is restored: **Joshua** the high priest. The other is not: **Zerubbabel** (descendant of King David) is told to wait, not to fight for the kingship:

Zechariah 4:6 (NIV)

This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD Almighty.

In the short term, the high priest must carry both roles—as king and priest:

Zechariah 6:11–13 (NIV)

¹¹ Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest, Joshua son of Jozadak. ¹² Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. ¹³ It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.'

Isaiah had promised the *Branch* from David's dead stump (Isaiah 11:1), Jeremiah did too (23:5; 33:15). That can't happen yet, so the high priest must fulfil the royal role too. The *crown* and *throne* added to this priestly role. These two roles—often in conflict—were now *harmonized* in one person.

But that was not a permanent arrangement. One day, the kingship would be restored, as God had promised Zerubbabel. One day, the king would come riding into Jerusalem:

Zechariah 9:9 (NIV)

⁹ Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Tragically, this coming shepherd would still face threats to his authority. Just as King Josiah had been struck down, resulting in the exile, the sword would again *strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered* (13:7, compare Matthew 26:31).

But in the end, God's kingship will be restored to earth. Just as God split the waters of the Red Sea to save Israel from Pharaoh, God will split the earth so his people are saved from every form of oppression (14:4). So, this is how the story ends:

Zechariah 14:9 (NIV)

⁹ The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name.

Your thoughts?

Malachi

Jerusalem had been rebuilt, but God's people were still not honouring their heavenly sovereign, so God sent Malachi (around 460 BC):

Malachi 1:6–8 (NIV)

⁶ “You priests show contempt for my name ... ⁷ saying that the LORD's table is contemptible. ⁸ When you offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice lame or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?” says the LORD Almighty.

Malachi reframed worship. Sacrifices were gifts that the nation offered to their heavenly sovereign, identifying themselves as God's people. But were they honouring God with their gifts? Worship isn't a ritual; it's a lifestyle that honours God. To worship is to lift up God's name among the nations (1:11).

Malachi 3:10 is often used in offering talks. I'll leave you to ponder how valid it is to equate Israel's *tithing* laws with giving to a church, and equating the *storehouse* with your church's bank account. In the new covenant where we have the Holy Spirit, should we be telling people to *put God to the test*?

Malachi 3:1 is more important. It promises the LORD would return to the house they provided for their heavenly sovereign. When did God do that? Were they ready for him? Would the city *endure the day of his coming*? (3:2)

The Old Testament concludes with more of a choice than an outcome:

Malachi 4:5–6 (NIV)

⁵ “See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. ⁶ He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.”

I wish all Christian theologians could grasp that God does not force his sovereignty on his people. Prophecy is conditional on how they respond (compare Jeremiah 18:7-10).

Would they respond to the prophets God sent them in the Elijah tradition, ultimately John the Baptist and then Jesus? Or would it end in desolation, the *total destruction* of the city that refused its king? Their choice.

5.4 Conclusion

When God's anointed arrived, nothing had changed. Like their ancestors, Jerusalem's rulers would kill to keep their power (Matthew 16:21 etc.).

“What about Elijah? Won't he come and set everything right?” the disciples asked. Jesus reminded them how the nation treated the most recent Elijah-prophet. That left Jesus as vulnerable as John the Baptist. He would die at the hands of those who kill the prophets. In rejecting God's anointed, Jerusalem chose *total destruction*. That's how Jesus saw it (Matthew 23:30–24:21).

Was the death of God's anointed king the end of all hope for the world? “No,” said Jesus. Heaven would intervene, overturn the existing powers, raising up the son of man to receive the kingship as God intended in the beginning (Matthew 24:29-31).

That is the gospel—the good-news for the whole world. More on that next week.

5.5 Resources

For one **book** covering the 12 Minor Prophets (as well as the rest of the Bible):

- Gordon Fee, and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour*. (Zondervan, 2014).

For **videos** on the Minor Prophets from Bible Project:

- <https://bibleproject.com/explore/book-overviews/?type=old>

For **posts** on the minor prophets, see <https://allenbrowne.blog/scriptureindex/>

- [Commentary on Zechariah](#)
- [God's message for Israel](#) (Hosea, Amos)
- [God's message for Assyria](#) (Nahum, Jonah)

For **commentaries**, try the "Understanding the Bible Commentary Series":

- Elizabeth Achtemeier. *Minor Prophets I*. (Baker Books, 2012).
- John Goldingay and Pamela Scalise. *Minor Prophets II*. (Baker Books, 2012).

New Testament quotations from the Minor Prophets:

Prophet	Quotation
Hosea 1:10	Romans 9:26
Hosea 2:23	Romans 9:25
Hosea 6:6	Matthew 9:13
Hosea 6:6	Matthew 12:7
Hosea 10:8	Luke 23:30
Hosea 11:1	Matthew 2:15
Hosea 13:14	1 Corinthians 15:55
Joel 2:28-32	Acts 2:21
Joel 2:32	Romans 10:13
Amos 5:25-27	Acts 7:43
Amos 9:11-12	Acts 15:17
Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:6
Micah 7:6	Matthew 10:36
Habakkuk 1:5	Acts 13:41
Habakkuk 2:3-4	Hebrews 10:38
Habakkuk 2:4	Romans 1:17
Habakkuk 2:4	Galatians 3:11
Haggai 2:6	Hebrews 12:26
Zechariah 9:9	Matthew 21:5 John 12:15
Zechariah 11:12-13	Matthew 27:10
Zechariah 12:10	John 19:37
Zechariah 13:7	Matthew 26:31 Mark 14:27
Malachi 1:2-3	Romans 9:13
Malachi 3:1	Matthew 11:10 Luke 7:27
Malachi 3:1	Mark 1:2

6 Christ fulfilling the Prophets

Why do the Prophets of the Old Testament matter to us? Can't we just have Jesus, and that's enough?

That's not how the New Testament presents Jesus. It quotes the Old more than 400 times. And most of those quotations are given to demonstrate how the Christ fulfils everything God promised in the Law and the Prophets.

We'll focus on just three words tonight: the **Christ**, the **gospel**, and the **end**. We'll show how these words have their roots in the Old Testament. The gospel proclaims the Christ who fulfils the Prophets in the end. Without the Prophets, we're missing the framework to understand the Christ, the gospel, and the end.

The backstory is that God established Israel as his kingdom among the nations, to demonstrate to the nations how earth was meant to be under heaven's reign. But like the nations, Israel refused to live under God's leadership, so they progressively fell to the nations. God sent prophets to call his people back to his leadership:

- 1) The **kingdom split**, so God sent Elijah, Elisha, Hosea and Amos—calling Israel back to himself and his anointed.
- 2) **Israel fell**, so God sent Isaiah, Micah, Joel, Zephaniah, Habbakuk, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—calling Judah back to himself.
- 3) **Exiled**, they lived under foreign rule, so God sent Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi—calling his people to return and his leadership would return to them.

The restoration of the kingdom is not a side issue in the Prophets. It's the main problem across the centuries. So the big question is:

How and when did God fulfil this promise, saving his people from oppression, restoring his reign over them?

That's why we've chosen these three keywords tonight:

- In the **end**, the prophets are fulfilled in Christ.
- The **gospel** is God's good news proclamation of his Christ as our Lord.
- The **Christ** is the heaven-anointed king who restores God's reign to the earth.

Let's look at each of these words in turn.

6.1 The Christ

Christ is the main word for Jesus in the New Testament. Forty times he's called *son of God*. Eighty times he calls himself *son of man*. More than 500 times, he's called *Christ*! It must be important. What does it mean?

Christ is not an English word. Χριστός (pronounced *christos*) is a Greek word meaning "anointed." We should have translated it as *Anointed*, but we just borrowed it. And since we treat it as a word that applies only to Jesus, we would never say "David was the LORD's Christ," even though we'd be happy to refer to David as "*the LORD's anointed*." We don't understand **Christ** = **anointed**. The meaning got lost in translation.



Chi (Χ) and Rho (ρ) are the first letters of the Greek word Χριστός (christos). The intertwined Chi-Rho is an early Christian symbol.

The Bible does speak of David as God's *anointed*. Whenever a descendant of David was enthroned as king, he became God's anointed. The Hebrew word was *māšîaḥ* (pronounced *messiah*). When that was translated into Greek a couple of centuries before Jesus, they used the word *christos* in the Septuagint.

For example, **Psalm 2:2** speaks of the reign of *the LORD and his anointed*. That's *māšîaḥ* in Hebrew, *christos* in Greek. The kingdom of Judah was ruled by *the LORD and his christos*. David was the LORD's christ (i.e. the Lord's anointed). Solomon was the LORD's christ, and so on.

It would be so much easier if we did not import foreign words like *māšîaḥ* and *christos*. "Anointed" is a perfectly good English word that conveys the meaning. Instead of calling Jesus the *Christ*, why not simply call him the *Anointed*?

Take the NIV for example. Most often it imports the Greek word into English as "Christ." About a quarter of the time, the NIV translates *christos* with the Hebrew word "Messiah" (Matthew 1:16, 17, 18; 2:4 etc). Only once does it actually translate the word into English (Acts 4:26). Couldn't we just use *Anointed*, and avoid the confusion?

The Prophets use *māšîaḥ* in ways that don't make sense if we don't translate it. We use *Messiah* only for Jesus, but Isaiah uses it for a Persian king:

Isaiah 44:24–45:4 (NIV)

²⁴ This is what the LORD says—your Redeemer ... ²⁸ who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid."'

45 ¹ This is what the LORD says to **his anointed** [*māšîaḥ*], to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armour, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut ...

⁴ For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honour, though you do not acknowledge me.

The Davidic kingship had fallen. God had handed his people over to Babylon. That means God had put Nebuchadnezzar in charge of his people.

Then God gave Babylon over to Persia, so Persia was reigning over his people. The Persian king Cyrus was therefore God's *anointed*, God's *messiah*, God's *christ* for his people at that time.

It's in this role as the servant of the LORD that Cyrus saves God's people. Mixed in with all the people of other nations who had also been exiled to Babylon, the Jews were in danger of losing their identity as the people of YHWH. But Cyrus put out an edict that the exiles from all the nations were to return to their homeland, rebuild their cities, worship their gods, and live according to their own culture and law. He even helped to fund the return and rebuilding.

Cyrus doesn't even know God (45:4). Cyrus is God's unwitting accomplice, the saviour provided by God to preserve his people and give them a future. In this oppressive setting, Cyrus is functioning as the LORD's anointed, the LORD's christ.

Isaiah's point is that if this gentile ruler could function as God's anointed and save God's people from extinction, the one who rules heaven and earth knows how to save his people completely.

God will send his Redeemer to Zion (Isaiah 58:20). The Davidic king will say, *the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor* (61:1). Literally, the Septuagint reads, "He has christed me to gospel the poor" (ἐχρίσέν με εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς).

Are you making sense of this as the meaning of *christ*?

So, is the New Testament making that claim when it calls Jesus the *Christ*? Is it saying he is the heaven-appointed ruler who restores earth as a kingdom of heaven?

Translate *christos* as "Anointed," and it becomes blindingly obvious that announcing Jesus as our heaven-anointed ruler is the main message of the New Testament:

- *The anointed son of David* is the opening statement (Matthew 1:1).
- *The good news about Jesus the anointed is the gospel* (Mark 1:1).
- Heaven announces this son of David as *the anointed lord* (Luke 2:11).
- John explains that *christos* means the same as *messiah* (John 1:41).
- Peter's gospel is: *God made this Jesus both lord and anointed* (Acts 2:36)
- Paul's gospel is: *This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the anointed* (Acts 17:3). That's why Paul gets arrested: he's announcing *another king* (verse 7).
- Paul's letters proclaim *Jesus the anointed ... on the basis of the prophetic writings*, so the nations will give him trusting obedience (Romans 16:25-27).
- The *anointed* being *crucified* is an oxymoron to *the rulers of this world whose power is coming to nothing* (1 Corinthians 1:1-6).

We can't pursue all 500+ references to the Anointed. If you want to do that, read: Joshua Jipp, *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 2020).

The last book of the New Testament presents *Jesus the anointed as ruler of the kings of the earth* (Revelation 1:5). The gospel that heaven announces is *the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, restored in the authority of his anointed* (Revelation 12:10).

Is that how you understand the claim that *Jesus is the Christ*?

"Jesus Christ is a claim, not a name."⁵

⁵ Matthew W. Bates, *Why the Gospel? Living the Good News of King Jesus with Purpose* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2023), 9.

6.2 The gospel

Gospel in the New Testament is *euangelion* (noun) or *euangelizō* (verb). It meant to make a big good-news announcement for the whole community. Picture a herald running back from battle shouting, "Good news! The battle is over! We won!"

So where did the word come from? You guessed it: the Prophets. The Septuagint used *euangelizō* here:

Isaiah 40:9-10 (NIV)

⁹ You who **bring good news** to Zion,
go up on a high mountain.
You who **bring good news to Jerusalem**,
lift up your voice with a shout,
lift it up, do not be afraid;
say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"
¹⁰ See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power,
and he rules with a mighty arm.



So what was the gospel according to Isaiah? What good news was he announcing?

After they'd been so long under foreign rule, the good news was that God was back to reign over them. For the people who returned from exile to rebuild Jerusalem, this was the news they were yearning to hear. "Get ready!" Isaiah said. "The Sovereign LORD is here in power, to rule us with his mighty strength!" (verse 10).

Isaiah pictures a runner arriving to announce God's reign, the end of oppression:

Isaiah 52:7 (NIV)

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who
bring good news, who proclaim peace, who **bring good tidings**,
who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

Isaiah's word became our main message. The **gospel** is that God's reign has returned to earth in God's anointed (his Christ).⁶

Today, we use *evangelize* to mean signing people up to the faith, getting them across the line by praying for forgiveness. That's not the gospel as heaven proclaims it.

Here's how an **angel** evangelizes:

Luke 2:10-12 (NIV)

¹⁰ The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you **good news** that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

The angel literally said, "I evangelize [*euangelizō*] you." The good news was David's descendant in David's town! God's *anointed* is our *Lord*! Now, that is good news for a world under all the wrong rulers (Luke 1:5; 2:1-2; 3:1, 19). The gospel is the proclamation of God's *anointed* as our *Lord*. That's *good news of great joy for all the people*.

⁶ See this Bible Project video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmFPS0f-kzs>

What's the *sign* that Jesus is the heaven-anointed ruler? He doesn't look anything like the rulers of this age. You find him not as a regal warrior in a luxury palace, but as a baby in torn rags, in a box prepared for animals (verse 12). That is heaven's gospel.

John the Baptist's gospel was Isaiah's gospel. In wild places far from the seats of power, John called people to prepare for God's reign (Luke 3:3-6, 18).

Jesus' gospel was Isaiah's gospel:

Luke 4:16-21 (NIV)

¹⁶ He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has **anointed** me to proclaim **good news** to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." [quoting Isaiah 61:1-2] ...

²¹ "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

The arrival of God's anointed was *good news* for those who'd missed out (*the poor*), recovery of sight for those who had lost their vision (the blind), freedom for people in captivity (*prisoners*). God's benevolent sovereignty (favour) was returning as he provided his anointed for his people.

That's the gospel Jesus proclaimed: "*Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.*" **Jesus' gospel** was the good news God proclaimed—*God's gospel*:

Mark 1:14-15 (my translation)

¹⁴ After John was handed over [to Herod] Jesus came to Galilee announcing **God's gospel**: ¹⁵ "The time has reached fulfilment. God's reign [kingdom] has come close. Turn and trust in the good news."

God's gospel is the good news of heaven's reign arriving on earth in his Christ. The response God expects to his gospel is that we turn from the world's rebellion against God's authority, giving our allegiance to his heaven-appointed leader (the Christ).

Since the gospel is God's proclamation of his Christ as our Lord, the gospel is the announcement of God's kingdom. It's the liberating news that God's reign is arriving in his Anointed.

Here's how Matthew summarizes Jesus' gospel:

Matthew 4:23 (NIV)

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the **good news of the kingdom**, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

Matthew 9:35 (NIV)

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the **good news of the kingdom** and healing every disease and sickness.

Matthew 24:14 (NIV)

This **gospel of the kingdom** will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

God's gospel. The angel's gospel. Jesus' gospel. John's gospel. The gospel in the Gospels is: heaven's reign is returning to earth in God's Anointed, as the Prophets said.

What gospel did the apostles proclaim in **Acts**? Pursue that for yourself (or your group):

<https://allenbrowne.blog/2020/04/06/the-apostles-gospel/>

(Hint: a link towards the end provides answers.)

Paul's gospel was God's gospel arriving in the Davidic Son who fulfils the Prophets:

Romans 1:2-4 (NIV)

... the gospel of God— ² the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³ regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, ⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

Peter's gospel was the good news that **Jesus Christ is Lord**, that heaven's anointed had come as our ruler reigning in power, the very thing the Prophets yearned to see:

2 Peter 1:16-21 (NIV)

¹⁶ We did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ...

²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Everything the Prophets said ultimately finds fulfilment in Christ. It was all about the glorious reign of God becoming reality on earth in God's Anointed:

2 Corinthians 1:20 (NIV)

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

That's how the Prophets are being fulfilled: in the Christ. God's "yes" to the world arrives in Christ. Our "yes" to him forms us into the community under his leadership, where the glorious reign of God is known on earth.

What a privilege. What an identity. What a challenge. It's who we are in Christ.

Is this something you would like to discuss further?

6.3 The end

The prophets yearned to see how the story would end. Sometimes it felt like it was all over, like when Ezekiel said: *The end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land!* (7:2).

It felt like that when Babylon invaded, destroying the capital where God reigned, cutting off the Davidic kingship, terminating Israel as a nation. God's kingdom was subsumed into Babylon.



But that was not the end of Ezekiel's prophecy. Thirty chapters later he's still going, and God asks him if the dry bones could live. God declares he will breathe his life into Jacob's deceased descendants. Both the northern tribes that fell to Assyria and the tribe that fell to Babylon will be raised to life, unified in the reign of the David king:

Ezekiel 37:22-24 (NIV)

²² I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms. ²³ ... They will be my people, and I will be their God. ²⁴ My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd.

The *end* for Ezekiel is not a destroyed world where Babylon wins and God loses. The end is a restored world where all God's people live under God's anointed, so they're known among the nations for this: *The LORD is there* (Ezekiel 48:35).

Jeremiah spent his life warning that Jerusalem would fall. It's a tragic historical reality, recounted in the final chapter (Jeremiah 52). But that was not Jeremiah's last word. His final oracle was *the word the LORD spoke through Jeremiah concerning Babylon and the land of the Babylonians* (50:1):

Jeremiah 51:13 (NIV)

¹³ You who live by many waters and are rich in treasures, your *end* has come, the time for you to be destroyed.

When *the words of Jeremiah end* (51:64), Babylon falls. Jeremiah calls God's people to *flee out of Babylon* (50:8), God promises, *I will bring Israel back to their own pasture* (50:19). Their future is the LORD's reign, not Babylon's:

Jeremiah 51:49-50 (NIV)

⁴⁹ "Babylon must fall because of Israel's slain, just as the slain in all the earth have fallen because of Babylon. ⁵⁰ You who have escaped the sword, leave and do not linger! Remember the LORD in a distant land, and call to mind Jerusalem."

It ends as Jeremiah promised earlier: a new covenant (31:31-33) restoring God's reign in the Branch from David's fallen family tree (23:5; 33:15).

Isaiah also promised the anointed Branch from David's family (Isaiah 11-12). Babylon falls (13-14), and a new Jerusalem is radiant with God's glory (60-62).

The end for Isaiah is not the destruction of everything. It's the restoration of everything God created: *a new heavens and a new earth* (65:17).

When God cleanses everything, all nations come under his kingship:

Isaiah 66:18 (NIV)

¹⁸ I ... am about to come and gather the people of all nations and languages, and they will come and see my glory.

The **Minor Prophets** also envisage an end where:

- *David's fallen tent* is raised (Amos 9:11)
- *the LORD dwells in Zion* (Joel 3:21)
- the LORD's authority extends to all creation (Jonah 4:10-11).
- the LORD's promises are fulfilled (Micah 7:20)
- *the LORD, the King of Israel is present* (Zephaniah 3:15)
- the son of David receives God's signet ring to reign (Haggai 2:23)
- *the LORD reigns over the whole earth* (Zechariah 14:9)

The end = the restoration of God's reign in his Anointed.

Eschatology is the study of how it all ends (literally *last things*). Christians argue about how to glue different Scriptures together. Are there seven years of tribulation, or three and a half? Does Christ sit on a literal throne for 1000 years, or is that figurative? Does God give us resurrection bodies to live in a new heavens and new earth, or do we float off to a bodiless existence in heaven while this creation is destroyed?

Whatever commitment you hold to particular views of end times, what's important is that we trust Christ to save us—not merely as individuals but as the community under his leadership (the kingdom of God).

Growing up in the nuclear age, we live in fear of destroying ourselves. We're inundated with images of a dystopian future, an apocalyptic disaster where artificial intelligence enslaves us or nuclear fallout makes the world uninhabitable.

In this culture of fear, we have a *gospel* to announce. It's the *good news* of the restoration of God's reign over all the *nations* of the world, in his anointed ruler.

This is *the end* Jesus envisaged:

Matthew 24:14 (NIV)

This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the **end** will come.

The end is not disaster. It's the goal God has in mind. It includes both Jerusalem and the nations under divine kingship (the kingdom of God). The good-news proclamation of God's anointed is the means that brings the end (the goal).

Jesus' vision for the end is the same as the Old Testament prophets. Even though everything fell—including God's anointed himself—God would shake the powers, and install the son of man with heaven's authority over the earth. This good news needs to be proclaimed to the nations, so *the end* God has always envisaged arrives for us all.

That's why **Paul** devoted his life to proclaiming the *good news* of the *Christ* (God's anointed ruler) to the *nations* (gentiles).

For Paul, *the end* is the demise of the rebellion, the restoration of God's reign in Christ:

1 Corinthians 15:24-26 (NIV)

²⁴ Then **the end** will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.

²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

God did not destroy his enemies to place his Christ on the throne. Consequently, his Christ must reign until all his enemies are under his authority. In the obedient human, God's reign is restored to humanity, as God decreed in the beginning.

Death was the ultimate enemy, capturing us when we disconnected from our life-source in the beginning. But even death is not the end. Christ conquered death when the Father raised him to life. The resurrection of the Anointed ruler is the evidence in the present that God will do this for all creation in the end. Isn't that what God promised for his people in the Prophets? (Ezekiel 37; Hosea 6:2)

Creation is restored as the servant king restores earth to heaven's governance.

Your thoughts? Anything else from the Old Testament Prophets you'd like to discuss?

6.4 Questions

Most Christians would agree that how we understand the Christ is crucial, and the gospel is our top priority message. This is important stuff, so:

1. How do you understand the *Christ*? Is that just another name for Jesus? Or does it mean the anointed ruler who saves the world from oppression and restores us as a kingdom of heaven, in fulfilment of all God's promises? Does it matter what *Christ* means? On a scale from "It's irrelevant" to "It changes everything," how important is this?
2. How do you understand the *gospel*? Is it a message about me, how I can gain personal forgiveness? Or is it God's declaration that his Christ is our Lord (by raising him from the dead), with the result that the earth is released from every form of evil (amnesty for the rebels who trust his leadership, and the ultimate release from every form of injustice)? In what ways does our understanding of the gospel shape the way we hear, respond to, and announce the gospel?
3. What will happen in the *end*? Will the world end badly? Or will God's good-news proclamation of his Christ as our Lord restore everything? What do you expect? How does this affect the way you do life now?

Do these questions matter? If so, meditate and discuss them further with your friends and connect group. What other questions would you add?

May the Holy Spirit who inspired the Prophets inspire us to live well under the leadership of God's anointed, forming us into the body of the Christ, the community that embodies the good news that God's anointed is our Lord and king.

6.5 Resources

On *gospel*, here's a study for your connect group to explore the content of the gospel the apostles proclaimed in the Book of Acts. (The second link gives the answers.)

<https://allenbrowne.blog/2020/04/06/the-apostles-gospel/>

<https://allenbrowne.blog/2020/04/08/the-apostles-gospel-explained/>

On *Christ*, this link contains more info, and quotes from others making this point. The second link covers how *Christ* is used in Ephesians, and what it means to be *in Christ*:

<https://allenbrowne.blog/2018/01/31/put-the-christ-back-in-christology/>

<https://allenbrowne.blog/2021/04/14/christ-in-ephesians-joshua-jipp/>

On how Christ received the kingship, Isaiah 53 is a favourite. This link sets that chapter in the context of Israel's role as God's suffering servant, God's response to their inability to deliver (becoming a servant to his servant), and so our role in Christ:

<https://allenbrowne.blog/2018/02/21/who-is-the-servant-of-the-lord/>

On *the end*,

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/day-of-the-lord/>

<https://allenbrowne.blog/2021/02/10/the-end-where-are-we-headed/>

<https://allenbrowne.blog/2019/03/25/it-doesnt-end-with-armageddon/>

For further reading on the gospel of the Christ as our God-anointed king, see:

- N. T. Wright. *How God Became King: Getting to the heart of the Gospels* (SPCK, 2012)
- Scot McKnight. *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Zondervan, 2011)
- Matthew W. Bates. *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (Baker Academic, 2017)
- Joshua Jipp. *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 2020)
- Nijay K. Gupta et al. *Living the King Jesus Gospel: Discipleship and Ministry Then and Now* (Cascade, 2021)