

Episode 4: The Truth We Need To Hear

The Prophets:

According to the early prophetic texts, a prophet was an individual called and equipped by God, chosen to speak a specific message to a specific community. These prophets often spoke of judgment for failing to adhere to God's commands and the consequences when people refused to repent from their ways and turn to God. Not all prophets spoke of doom and gloom, many offered hope and promise to those who kept their covenant with God.

These books were divided into Major and Minor Prophets simply because of the length of their writings. Major Prophets tend to be longer in length with a larger focus for their ministry. Mostly written during the time of the divided kingdom, these books speak to the realities of the people of Israel and Judah and the difficulties of life together in these communities.

Isaiah:

The prophet Isaiah was said to be written between 739-681 B.C. and speaks to the people of Judah who were on the precipice of military domination. Fearing that Judah, if ruled by other nations, would turn to their gods, Isaiah confronts the leaders, telling them to maintain their faith in God's faithfulness and salvation. The main purpose of this book is to communicate God's anger and sorrow for Judah's unfaithfulness and to warn them of God's judgment if they continue down the same path. Isaiah calls the people of Judah to repentance and trust that "Yahweh Saves" (Meaning of Isaiah.) Isaiah, on the surface, feels like a saga of doom and gloom lays the foundation of a coming king, a Messiah, who will fulfill God's promise to the people of Israel.

Jeremiah:

Jeremiah, the pessimist, called for total repentance and turning back to God, warning that failure to do so would lead to the destruction of Judah and the ultimate fall of Jerusalem to outsiders. Jeremiah spoke of the hypocrisy of religious leaders, fiscal dishonesty amongst leaders and communities, and the oppressive means by which Judah's leaders ruled over their people. Jeremiah called attention to hard truths that the people of God needed to hear, naming their sin and their disobedience with God, knowing that ruin would befall their city and their people. (Jer. 22:6-8) In 586 B.C., the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem, destroying the temples and walls and carrying off God's people.

Prophetic Books	
<i>Major Prophets:</i> Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Ezekiel Daniel	<i>Minor Prophets:</i> Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi

Lamentations:

The book of Lamentations is a collection of poems and songs of sorrow for the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Accredited to Jeremiah, the prophet who witnessed first-hand the destruction of God's temple and the carting off the people of God to be put into slavery. Lamentations 1:1, "How lonely sits the city that was full of people! She has become like a widow who was once great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a forced laborer!" The book describes the anguish of God's people and the great loss because of their lack of faith and obedience to God.

Ezekiel:

Ezekiel is known for prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem and the work of God's people as they ultimately return to the land of Israel. Ezekiel is a contemporary of Jeremiah, and many of the experiences are similar in form and structure.



Daniel:

Daniel was taken into captivity by King Nebuchadnezzar sometime after the fall of Jerusalem. The book of Daniel follows his role in the King's court, his steadfast faith, and loyalty to God. Daniel is known for his prophetic writings because they deal with the current reality of God's people in an apocalyptic way; that they predict the fulfillment of God's promise to God's people.

Hosea:

Hosea wrote this book to remind the Israelites—and us—that ours is a loving God whose loyalty to His covenant people is unwavering. Despite Israel's continual turning to false gods, God's steadfast love is portrayed in the long-suffering husband of the unfaithful wife. Hosea's message is also one of warning to those who would turn their backs on God's love. Through the symbolic presentation of the marriage of Hosea and Gomer, God's love for the idolatrous nation of Israel is displayed in a rich metaphor in the themes of sin, judgment, and forgiving love.

Joel:

The date of Joel's writing is uncertain; however, he is writing to the people of Judah, and the message is obvious. Joel speaks of a coming plague of locusts that represents God's punishment of Judah. Judah had several kings who choose to reform religious life based on their selfish motives. This unfaithfulness to God causes the people to sin and break their relationship with God. Joel's word of promise is that God hears God's people when they turn from their ways, repent because God does not wish to punish but show compassion and mercy.

Amos:

Amos, a grower of sycamore figs, didn't call himself a prophet. Amos spoke out against the northern kingdom of Israel. Amos speaks out against the communities of Israel who have no care for their neighbor, who took advantage of others and remained a selfish focus calling for a refocus on God's idea of justice and remembering God's promise to God's people.

Obadiah:

Obadiah is the shortest book of the Old Testament at only 21 verses long. This book continues the saga between brothers Jacob and Esau, who become the settlers of the nations of Israel and Edom. Edom rejoices over the destruction of Israel, and instead of helping the exiles, they encourage their destruction. Obadiah calls for all nations who wrong the innocent to be punished. Edom is later destroyed and will never recover from their captors, while Israel will be restored. Yet, there is an undercurrent of hope found in this text. All who repent and turn from their evil ways are included in God's Kingdom.



Jonah:

We all know, at least on the surface, about the prophet in the belly of the whale. Jonah was called to speak to the people of Nineveh for their worshipping of idols. The beautiful piece of this story is that the city repents and is spared by God, which of course, makes the prophet upset. We are left with a story of God's mercy and a prophet who learns a lesson.

Micah:

Micah's prophetic teachings come before and after the fall of Israel in 722 B.C., speaking of corruption and exploitation of the poor and injustice in the court systems. Micah also points the fingers at religious leaders who fail to fulfill their responsibilities to God. This book counterpoints its judgment with a call for God's people to repent, "do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God." (6:8)

Nahum:

Nahum's message comes between the destruction of Thebes (663 B.C.) and Nineveh (612 B.C.) and stresses that God is sovereign over all of history and all the world. God is good and just. Therefore, he is a champion of the outraged and outcast. While God uses a wicked nation to punish unfaithful Israel, God also holds them accountable for their actions. Speaking of God's justice for all the world.

Habakkuk:

The central question of Habakkuk, Is God good if the world is so unjust? Habakkuk calls out to God, asking God to deal with the injustices of the world, and gets angry when there is no resolution. Habakkuk is a collection of laments from the prophet, speaking to the concerns he sees from the people of Israel.

Zephaniah:

A prophet to Judah, Zephaniah speaks of the impending Day of the Lord more than any other book in the Old Testament. Zephaniah speaks a word of Judgement to Judah, predicts the fall of this once great kingdom to the Babylonians. There is also a word of hope that all will eventually be restored by God and all people will be blessed.



Haggai:

Haggai takes a jump forward in time to the end of the exile and the return of the Jews to the promised land. Haggai's focus remains on the temple and the importance of worship and worship practices as part of the return of the remnant of the people of God.

Zachariah:

Near the end of the exile, as the people of Judah are returning, Zachariah notes the importance of asking God a serious question. "How long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years? (1:12) The message of assurance that God has not forgotten them even though they have been exiled is a word of hope for God's people.

Malachi:

The last book of the Old Testament is written sometime after the temple has been rebuilt in 516 B.C. Malachi is addressing the lethargy that has already taken hold of the people. God and worship have become a chore for the people of God. Malachi calls out those who worship idols, sorcerers, and the breadth of human sin that has taken hold of the rebuilt city. The challenge of this book is that it leaves us with a question of the unfinished reality of the world and the state of the people of Israel as their relationship with God hangs by a thread. What follows this book is a period of silence lasting around 400 years.

Binge the Bible Weekly Reading Plan:

Instead of a formal weekly reading plan, we invite you to spend each day in one of the prophetic books listed above.

1. What does this book say about the people of God?
2. What does this book say about God?
3. Where do you see connections between today and these passages from history?