

# Old Testament Survey

## Class Five

### The Divisions of the Old Testament

#### The Prophets

**The last seventeen books of the Old Testament are known as “the Prophets”.**  
**The first five of those books are called “the Major Prophets” while the last twelve are known as “the Minor Prophets”.** Here are the prophetic books in their Biblical order:

- ) Isaiah
- ) Jeremiah
- ) Lamentations
- ) Ezekiel
- ) Daniel
- ) Hosea
- ) Joel
- ) Amos
- ) Obadiah
- ) Jonah
- ) Micah
- ) Nahum
- ) Habakkuk
- ) Zephaniah
- ) Haggai
- ) Zechariah
- ) Malachi

While the Poetical Books were written during Israel's 'Golden Age'; the Prophets were written during days of apostasy and spiritual darkness in Israel.

In Deuteronomy 18:15-22, Moses wrote that God would raise up “*prophets*” to preach the messages of God. And... God did exactly what He said. The word *prophet* in the Hebrew means “*to bubble forth, as from a fountain,*” or, *to utter*. The “prophet” proclaimed the message given to him, and as such, a prophet was a spokesman for God;

he spake in God's name and by his authority (Exodus 7:1). He is the mouth by which God speaks to men (Jeremiah 1:9; Isaiah 51:16); therefore, what the prophet says is not of man but of God. The office of a prophet started during the time of Samuel and ended with Malachi. The time of the prophets can be divided into two parts. Before the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. the prophets were primarily spokesmen to the kings. Samuel, Nathan, Elijah and Elisha are examples. During and after the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the prophets directed their messages to the nation of Israel as a whole and sometimes even to foreign nations. It was also during this time that the prophet's messages began to be written down and kept. “*The prophets were authoritative and influential teachers because they were direct spokesmen of God. They received their messages directly from God and preached them to the people. Sadly, the prophets were very unpopular in their own time because they spoke against immorality and religious apostasy. By the way, that kind of preaching is unpopular in any timeframe. But it is always sorely needed!*” – Pastor Phil Spencer

Here are some interesting facts about this division of the Old Testament called “the Prophets”;

1. The time span of the Prophets was about 400 years from 800 BC to 400 BC.
2. **There are seventeen books of the Prophets but only sixteen writers: Jeremiah wrote the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations.**
3. **The difference between the Major Prophets and Minor Prophet is the size of the books.**
4. **The Four Major Prophets who wrote five books are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.**

5. Each of the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel are larger than all twelve of the Minor Prophets combined.
6. The Book of Daniel is about the size of the two largest Minor Prophets combined: Hosea and Zechariah.
7. Thirteen of the prophets were associated with the destruction of the Hebrew nation. The Northern Kingdom (known as Israel after the nation split) fell in the period of 734-721 BC. The prophets the prophesied preceding to and during this period of time were Joel, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. The Southern Kingdom (known as Judah after the nation split) fell between 606 and 586 BC. The prophets who prophesied during this period of time were Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah.
8. Three of the prophets were associated with the restoration of the southern kingdom of Judah: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

### **The Major Prophets:**

) The book of **Isaiah** is the first of the seventeen books of prophecy and the first of the five Major Prophets. The author of the book is Isaiah. The name 'Isaiah' means "Yahweh is salvation". This is the twenty-third book in the Bible. **The Book of Isaiah is like a miniature Bible. It has sixty-six chapters just like the bible has sixty-six books.** The first thirty-nine chapters are filled with condemnation and judgment just like the Old Testament (Law). The last twenty-seven chapters declare a message of hope just like the New Testament. Isaiah 40 begins just like

Matthew with "the voice of one crying in the wilderness". Isaiah 66 ends like Revelation with a message of the New Heaven and the New Earth. Isaiah has been called by some "The Apostle Paul of the Old Testament." Historical tradition says that Isaiah's persecutors sawed him in half during the reign of Manasseh. Hebrews 11:37 speaks of those who were sawn asunder. Isaiah was a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah. In fact, he was ministering to Judah while the Assyrians were conquering the northern kingdom of Israel. Isaiah's ministry included the reign of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. He was a contemporary with Hosea and Micah. The word "salvation" appears in Isaiah twenty-six times, but only seven times in all the other prophets combined. One of the greatest verses in Isaiah is Isaiah 1:18: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Isaiah 53 is probably the greatest chapter in the book as well as the greatest Messianic prophecy in the whole Bible.

) **Jeremiah** is the twenty-fourth book on the Bible and the second of the Prophets. The prophet, Jeremiah, authored this book with the exception of chapter 52. **Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet.** His ministry spanned more than forty years from 627 to 580 BC. Jeremiah was from the city of Anathoth which was about two miles south of Jerusalem. His father was Hilkaiah, the priest. It is very interesting to note that Jeremiah was called to be a prophet before he was born

according to Jeremiah 1:5 “*Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.*”

Jeremiah was a persecuted prophet by his own people. He prophesied of the coming judgment of God upon the southern kingdom of Judah by Babylon. In fact, he prophesied about Babylon’s conquering Judah so much so, that Babylon is referred to at least 164 times. His countrymen viewed him as being unpatriotic with his allegiance to Babylon. He prophesied specifically that the Babylonian Captivity would last for seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11-14; 29:10). In fact, the prophet Daniel said in Daniel 9:2 “*In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.*” Jeremiah dictated his writings to his secretary, Baruch the scribe. He communicated God’s message through parables, sermons, and object lessons. But Jeremiah’s message was not just a message of judgment: In Jeremiah 31, God used Jeremiah to prophesy of a New Covenant that God would make for His People, the nation of Israel. Though judgment was falling because of sin, mercy would be extended through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ! Jeremiah 18-19 are probably the most famous chapters in the book as Jeremiah visits the Potters House and God uses that to give an object lesson to the nation of Israel.

) **Lamentations** is the second book authored by Jeremiah. Lamentations

means “laments, tears”. This book was written soon after Jerusalem’s destruction by the Babylonians. On August 15, 588 BC, the Babylonians burned Jerusalem and the Temple. Lamentations describes the funeral of Jerusalem. God used Babylon as His instrument to chastise His children for their rebellion against Him. But even in the midst of judgement, Jeremiah cries out in Lamentations 3:22-23 “*It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.*” What is the importance of a book like Lamentations? Like the book of Job, Lamentations pictures a man of God confused over the results of evil and suffering in the world. However, while Job dealt with unexplained evil, Jeremiah wept for a tragedy entirely of Jerusalem’s making. The people of this once great city experienced the judgment of the holy God, and the results were devastating. The structure of the book highlights the Grace of God. While the first two and last two chapters point to the devastation which was deserved, the book climaxes at the middle chapter which focuses on the goodness of God. He is the LORD of mercy, of faithfulness, of hope and of salvation: At the heart of this book, at the center of this *lament* over the effects of sin in the world, we find a few verses devoted to hope in the Lord (Lamentations 3:22–25). What an inspiration this set of verses are to men suffering the consequences of their own sin and disobedience.

Lamentations reminds us of the importance not only of mourning over our sin but of asking the Lord for His forgiveness when we fail Him.