

Bible Study # 47
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Major Prophets Series—Introduction

This evening we are going to get into the Major Prophets. We want **to examine a little bit about who the major prophets were. We want to look at their place in the Scriptures, the roles that these individuals played, and the role that these books play in the Bible—and the roles that they should play for us.** We are going to look specifically at **Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.** We are going to look at a little bit of background in each of these three books and perhaps gain some insight that can help us to understand a little more of what is involved. Then we will begin, step by step, through the book of Isaiah, then Jeremiah and Ezekiel. I have study questions that I will pass out at the end of the Bible study that will carry us through the first 14 chapters of the book of Isaiah, which is what we will cover next time. As you can see, we will go through this in some detail.

To begin with, let's understand a little bit as to who the prophets were. The prophets served as God's spokesmen to His covenant people. God made a covenant with the ancient Israelites at Mount Sinai, which was based upon the covenant that He had made with their forefather Abraham several centuries earlier. God began to deal with the covenant people by sending His spokesmen, His messengers.

The sense of the word "prophet" was "one who proclaimed or announced." We think of prophecy as something being predicted—as simply concerned about the future. This is one aspect of prophecy. That is generally what we think of when we use the term, but the word for prophecy or prophet is used in a broader sense in the Bible. Some aspects that are referred to are certainly predictive and deal with future events. There are other aspects that deal simply with God's announcement, God's proclamation and God's message to His people. The prophet was the one who announced or proclaimed. God's prophet announced or proclaimed God's message.

Samuel is reckoned as the first of the prophets. The term "prophet" began to be applied first to Samuel. This term came into vogue, into use, at the time of Samuel.

1 Samuel 9:9, we are told, "(Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he spoke thus: 'Come, let us go to the seer'; for he who is

now called a prophet was formerly called a seer.)" The term "prophet" is a broader term than "seer." "Seer" was restricted to "one whom God gave insight to see the future or to see what others did not see." The term "prophet" included the one to whom God gave that insight, but it reflected, let's say, a larger role. The prophet came on the scene at a time when the priesthood began to deteriorate in terms of its faithfulness in fulfilling their function. Had they been faithful, the role of seer, spokesman or messenger from God was a role that would have been played by the high priest and those assisting him.

At this point, God began dealing with Samuel who was not of the high priestly line. Samuel was of the Levitical line but not of the high priestly line. He was not in line to become high priest, but God used him as a spokesman. The high priest of the family of Eli continued to hold that position. Because of the example they had set, God ceased to work through that hereditary line in the way that He had previously. While they functioned in an official and ceremonial capacity, God now began to raise up spokesmen and messengers, beginning with Samuel. With Samuel God began a prophetic succession. The term "prophet" came into vogue at the time of Samuel.

Samuel evidently established schools or colleges (using our modern term) for the training of the prophets.

1 Samuel 19:18, this is mentioned, "So David fled and escaped, and went to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and stayed in Naioth." "Naioth" means "schoolhouse" in Hebrew.

Verse 19, the word got back to Saul that David was there.

Verse 20, "Then Saul sent messengers to take David. And when they saw the group of prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as leader over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied." It describes a group of prophets prophesying. Now the term "prophesying" is a term that can include a variety of things. It can in context (depending on the way it's used) describe everything from an inspired message to a song service that is particularly inspiring or inspirational. It can describe inspired preaching, the spirit of song service or the delivery of a message that has to do with future events. It can, depending on context, mean all of those things.

In the context here, we have those who were of Samuel's school of the prophets at what we call

the schoolhouse. What it describes is this group who were having what we would term a “song fest” or something of that sort. They were going through, perhaps, what is included in the book of Psalms today. Samuel gathered about him a group of what were called “a group of the prophets” or “sons of the prophets.” It simply meant those who were students at his prophetic school.

These schools are mentioned at the time of Elijah and Elisha, about 120 years after Samuel’s death (2 Kings 2). It describes Elijah having been responsible for three schools of the prophets: one at Gilgal (v. 1), one at Bethel (v. 3) and one at Jericho (v. 5).

Verses 3 and 5 describe the students as “sons of the prophets.” The term “sons of the prophets” is a term that simply refers to the students at the school that Elijah ran.

Evidently, Samuel was responsible for beginning the schools. It was the “Ambassador College” of the day. The schools were a means of teaching, a means of instruction. There was not, as in the priesthood, a direct hereditary father-son succession. Rather, the prophet filled the position or role because God called him and used him in that way, as a messenger or as a spokesman. There was generally a certain amount of training that was involved. All of those who were trained did not go on to be used in some significant fashion. The roles varied.

There are **two basic categories of prophets**: Those who were oral prophets and those who wrote down their prophetic message. The **oral prophets** had messages that pertained primarily to their own time, their own people, in their own day. **Elijah and Elisha were primarily oral prophets.** There is no book of Elijah nor is there a book of Elisha.

We read of Nathan, the prophet in the time of King David. We read of various ones that are mentioned in passing in the Old Testament of whom there is very little record of what they said. We have an example more of what Elijah did than we do of what he said. Clearly the bulk of the message that those individuals were given by God pertained to their own day, their own people and it pertained to that time. That’s why it was not recorded and preserved for us because the portions that pertained to us were recorded.

Primarily, the example that those individuals lived and set was the portion of their work that had the greatest relevance for us today. That’s why that’s what we have. We have far more of the story of what Elijah did than we have the

story of what he said because the primary thrust and impact of his message was for people at that time. While what he did and the way he did it had a primary impact on the people at that day, it also set a pattern. His ministry set a pattern that would characterize the ministry that prepared the way for Jesus Christ. John the Baptist did that prior to the first coming of Jesus Christ.

There is an Elijah work to prepare the way for the second coming of Jesus Christ. Elijah’s work and ministry set a pattern that would be noted, let’s say, in preparing the way for the Messiah. The message Elijah delivered was not what we think of as a prophetic message in the sense that the books of Daniel, Revelation, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Malachi, or whatever have as far as relevance to us today. The oral prophets were messengers of God, but the primary thrust of their message was a relevance to the audience to whom it was delivered.

Now, on the other hand, we have the **written prophets**. The books of the **Major and Minor Prophets** in our Bible are clearly written prophets. The thrust of their message was not primarily for their time. They delivered messages that were relevant for their time, but God gave them a revelation that had more significance for us today than it had for the people of 2,500 years ago. Their message was written down and not only was it written down, it was preserved. There is an enduring significance not simply to the messenger or to the work that the messenger did, but there is an enduring significance to the message itself—the message that was delivered. As I have mentioned, the term “prophet” in the original use of the term was viewed not so much as a foreteller of events but as “a bearer of God’s message.”

We use the terms “Major” and “Minor” Prophets. It is important that we understand the difference. The terms “Major” and “Minor” as applied to the prophets was not an attempt to catalog their worth or their value. It does not catalog the importance of the message, as saying that Isaiah’s message was more important than Malachi’s or Jeremiah’s was more important than Hosea or Haggai. That’s not what the terms mean. It is simply a reference to length. There is a vast difference between Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel in terms of the length, as compared with the 12 minor prophets of Hosea through Malachi. So, the terms “Major” and “Minor” have been used relative to the size of the book.

Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are the ones who are recognized or have been considered as the

Major Prophets. Their books are arranged for us in the order that these three men began their prophetic ministry. That's the reason why we have it that way. Why isn't it Ezekiel, Isaiah and Jeremiah or some other arrangement? Well, generally there is either the subject matter that is the basis of arrangement or it is simply arranged chronologically.

Isaiah began to prophesy at an earlier time. The beginning of Isaiah's ministry was prior to the time that Northern Israel went into captivity, which was in the late 700s B.C.—what would be termed the late eighth century. His ministry was a very lengthy ministry. He lived up until a ripe old age. He prophesied many years.

Jeremiah's ministry, in the same way, was a lengthy ministry. It began much later than Isaiah. Jeremiah began his ministry a couple of decades prior to the time that Judah began to go into captivity. In other words, he began his ministry a good 100 years or more later than Isaiah did.

Ezekiel's ministry overlapped with Jeremiah's, but it began perhaps 30 to 35 years later than Jeremiah's began. Jeremiah's was a rather lengthy ministry. Ezekiel's was a fairly short ministry. We will go through and note, in a few moments, the similarities and the differences between each of these books.

Isaiah is where we start. Isaiah began his writings in the last year of King Uzziah or in 732 B.C.

Isaiah 6:1, this is dated, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple." Isaiah described his calling. This is descriptive of the beginning of his ministry, of his calling.

Verse 5, he sees this vision of God; he is awestruck and overcome by a sense of his own unworthiness. Obviously, any time we really see and grasp the glory and the grandeur of God, we should correspondingly be struck with a sense of our own inadequacies.

Matthew 5:3, that's what's meant by the term Jesus said in, "Blessed are the poor in spirit..." The "poor in spirit" are those who recognize their own lack of spiritual self-sufficiency. They recognize how much they need what God has to offer. They are not as the Pharisee was when he and the tax collector (KJV, "publican") went out to pray. You remember the story Jesus told.

Luke 18:10-13, the Pharisee lifted up his eyes and said, 'Lord, I thank you that I'm not as other men are. I am this wonderful person. I'm glad you noticed me because I really deserve it.' This

was the sense of it. His perspective on life was a total contrast to the tax collector who recognized his own unworthiness.

When we get it in proper perspective, we recognize that none of us is worthy of God's mercy. God extends His mercy and His love, but it's not because He looked down and was so impressed with us that He thought 'I have to do something special for that fellow. I've never seen anybody that great. I'm really impressed with him (or her).'

Isaiah clearly did not have that perspective on life. He was impressed when God revealed Himself in this vision.

Isaiah 6:5, Isaiah said, "... 'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; ...'" 'I am not holy enough to see. I do not deserve this. I'm not worthy of a revelation like this.'

In the vision described in verses 6-7, an angel took a coal off the altar of incense, touched it to Isaiah's lips and he was symbolically purified.

Verse 8, God said, 'I need somebody to do a job,' and Isaiah said, 'Here I am! Send me.' It was recognition of what God could do through him. We have the description in Isaiah 6 of what was clearly the beginning of Isaiah's ministry. It dates it to the last year of King Uzziah.

The first five chapters of Isaiah set the stage for the message of Isaiah. The book of Isaiah was not a diary that Isaiah kept. He didn't just start writing this on the first day, and the second day he wrote—and the book just kind of goes through in the order of his life. That's not the case. There is more of a message content. The first five chapters kind of set the stage and introduce the book in terms of subject matter. Chapter 6 then picks up the story at the beginning by showing us how Isaiah began his ministry. Then the theme continues.

Isaiah 1:1, we are told, "The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah." We are told in chapter 6:1 that this began in the last year of Uzziah—which was 732 B.C. This is about ten years before the Assyrian invasion of Northern Israel. Isaiah's message was a message that utilized the events that were happening in his time, the things that Judah and Israel went through in his day, but the primary thrust of the book of Isaiah is for the last days.

Isaiah 2:2, we are told, "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days..." The emphasis, you see,

is a message for the latter days—“in the latter days” or “in that day.”

Isaiah 1:1 is a message concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Now, at one time when the whole nation was united, Jerusalem was the capital city, not only of Judah, but the capital of the whole nation. When all the 12 tribes were united as one nation, Jerusalem was the combined capital. Jerusalem is used symbolically to describe the entirety of Israel. It refers symbolically to all of Israel. The book of Isaiah is very clear—there are specific references to the house of Israel, as well as of the men of Judah.

Isaiah 5:7, for instance, “For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant.” It is clear that there is a distinction between the house of Israel and the house of Judah. The term “Jerusalem” is used symbolically. Many of the things that were going on in Judah were used symbolically to refer to all of Israel. But at the time Isaiah began to write, there were two totally separate nations of Israel and Judah.

Israel went into captivity beginning about ten years after Isaiah began his ministry, but the deportation of the Israelites took place over the next couple of decades or so. They didn’t have the cattle cars and the railroad trains available to them to herd the people and ship them out, but they were pretty efficient. It took a little longer, and they had to rely on the methods they had available. The depopulation of Northern Israel actually took place for a little over two decades. Isaiah’s ministry went through this period of time.

We have no information in the book of Isaiah about the end of Isaiah’s life, but according to Jewish tradition, he was sawn in two by order of the wicked King Manasseh during the first year of his reign. Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, was the most wicked king that Judah ever had. There is reference in Hebrew 11 to the men and women of faith. It mentions the tribulations endured by some, describes the fate of certain ones and mentions “sawn in two” (v. 37). There’s no place in the Old Testament where it specifically describes that martyrdom. However, there is a Jewish tradition that says that was the fate of Isaiah during the first year of Manasseh’s reign.

Isaiah’s ministry began in 732 B.C. (the last year of Uzziah) and continued down to the end of the lifetime of King Hezekiah, which would bring it down to 686 B.C. We’re looking at a 45-50-year period of his prophetic ministry. It was a lengthy ministry. He started out as a relatively young

man, and he was clearly in advanced years at the end of his ministry.

We’re not told a lot about Isaiah’s background. In Isaiah 1:1, we are told that he was the son of Amoz. According to the *Soncino Jewish Commentary* (a Jewish commentary on the Old Testament), Amoz was the brother of Judah’s King Amaziah. This would mean that Isaiah was a cousin of the royal line of the kings, and this connection would explain the ease with which Isaiah had continual access to the kings of Judah. Let’s look at the authorship of the book of Isaiah. If you want to look in any of the commentaries, particularly any of the more modern commentaries, you will find that the question of the authorship of Isaiah has been greatly disputed by all of the modern critics. Most modern critics claim that only the first 39 chapters of Isaiah were written by Isaiah; the rest were written by one who they called “Deutero-Isaiah,” which means “the second Isaiah.” There are some who even postulate a “Trito-Isaiah”; they think there were “three who wrote Isaiah.”

There is a very important reason why the critics divide the book of Isaiah and why some say part of it was written by Isaiah and part of it was written quite a bit later by another man who claimed to be Isaiah. There’s a real problem that they have with the latter part of the book of Isaiah and that is because of how specific certain prophecies are. The real problem that the critics have is with the idea that there is a God who steps into history and literally inspires His servants—a God who reveals the future because He determines and He governs in the affairs of men (Daniel 4:32). Any time you get into something that is clearly prophetic, the critics always want to say that it really wasn’t prophetic, it was written after the fact.

One of the problems they run into is a message recorded in Isaiah 44 and 45.

Isaiah 44:23-28, “Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it! Shout, you lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, you mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the Lord had redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel. Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, and He who formed you from the womb: ‘I am the Lord, who makes all things, who stretches out the heavens all alone, who spreads abroad the earth by Myself; who frustrates the signs of the babblers, and drives diviners mad; who turns wise men backward, and makes their knowledge foolishness; who confirms the word of His servant, and performs the counsel of His

messengers; who says to Jerusalem, "You shall be inhabited," to the cities of Judah, "You shall be built," and I will raise up her waste places; who says to the deep, "Be dry! And I will dry up your rivers"; who says of Cyrus, "He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure," even saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," and to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."""

Isaiah 45:1-5, "Thus says the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held—to subdue nations before him and loose the armor of kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut: "I will go before you and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places; that you may know that I, the Lord, who call you by your name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob My servant's sake, and Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; there is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me."""

God is naming, by name, Cyrus who God was going to raise up to do a job to free the Jews from Babylonian captivity and to allow them to return and rebuild Jerusalem. At the time the book of Isaiah was written, the Jews hadn't even gone into captivity, much less Cyrus coming along. Isaiah died 150 years before Cyrus ever conquered Babylon. Cyrus wasn't even "a gleam in his father's eye" when Isaiah wrote Isaiah 44 and 45.

This really bothers the critics. They say, 'Clearly Isaiah 44 and 45 weren't written by Isaiah because that would mean that this man was known by name years before he was ever born, and that's impossible!' Why is it impossible? It said right in the context that God said, 'Look, I'm God; I call things that are not as though they were' (46:10).

Let's look at the problem of somebody else having written part of the book of Isaiah. According to their teaching, this last part of the book of Isaiah could not have been written until after the Jews returned from exile in Babylon because the fulfillment of some of these things described what happened after the Jews returned, after the Persians had conquered Babylon. Now, what's the problem with that? What is the likelihood of being able to add in something like that? When you're looking at something that was

considered a part of Scripture, you're looking at what was considered the basic law of the land.

What do you think would be the likelihood of getting in and forging something on the end of the Bill of Rights and being able to fool everybody to think there are not ten amendments but 13 to the Bill of Rights—amendments kind of written there in the margin—saying this is a part of it. That's ludicrous! There are too many copies and it's too well known. If you tried to tack on to the bottom and claim that this was part of the original, that's silly! You'd never pull off a fraud like that because it's too well known.

Here you are looking at something that there was no way a fraud like that could be pulled off. Here was a book that had been accepted and established as a part of Scripture for many, many years. How can you come along and tack something on the end of it and claim it's been there all along? How can you pull off a fraud like that?

The only reason for objecting to it is the fact that the critics object to God. They object to the fact that there is a God in heaven who declares the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10). As a result, they reject all prophecy. They reject anything that smacks of God's intervention in the affairs of man. They say, 'Well, there are certain differences in style or differences of language of some chapters at the end of Isaiah, as opposed to the beginning.'

Isaiah's ministry spanned 45 years. The message that he gave was the same. But, obviously, in a period of 45 years, from a young man to an old man, depending on what he's writing about, certain styles changed. Just the fact of the passing of years, there may be certain stylistic changes.

You can look at things that Mr. Herbert Armstrong wrote. If you have a copy of something he wrote in the 40s and compare it with something he wrote in the 80s, while the message and the thrust is the same, you may notice certain differences in terms of style of presentation. You may notice that there were periods, let's say, earlier on when some of his style of writing had emphasis of punctuation, capitalization or things like that which reflected a lot more of his early advertising training. And as the years progressed, some things that he wrote in later life did not reflect that exact same style of writing. There were certain changes that took place. The message was the same, but you can have differences just over a period of time.

When you look at something you wrote years ago and then look at something you would write

today, there are differences. I can look back at things that I wrote 20 years ago, and I don't think I would write it exactly the same today. I'm not saying that I wouldn't come to the same conclusion. A paper I wrote in college, I don't think I would express it exactly the same way today. I like to think I would express it a little better, but that may be an open question.

The point is that as the years go by, it is natural and normal that there are going to be certain stylistic variations. That doesn't disprove the same person wrote it. We are looking at a 40-50-year time period by the book's own claim. We would normally expect that there's going to be certain variations in terms of style over that long a period of time—plus the fact that the style of writing is going to vary somewhat with the subject matter that is being addressed. That's normal and natural also.

Isaiah 46:10 makes plain that this portion of Isaiah is intended as a prophecy, “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand and I will do all My pleasure.’”

Verses 9-10, “Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, ...” How do you think you can write something like this and tack it on to the end of a book that people have been familiar with. Then you say, ‘This is prophetic here. Look at how amazing this prophecy is,’ when it is talking about an event that happened 15 years ago. How do you plot out something like that if it makes no sense?

In fact, it's interesting because Isaiah is probably one of the books of the Old Testament that the critics dispute the most in terms of its authorship. Yet Isaiah is referred to probably more than any other one prophet in the New Testament. Isaiah is quoted by name 21 times in the New Testament. Isaiah is quoted ten times from the first portion of Isaiah and 11 times from the last portion. So, it is well divided.

There are four specific instances where Jesus Christ Himself quotes the prophecy and says Isaiah wrote it. Now, if anybody ought to know, Jesus ought to know and He thought Isaiah wrote it. And if Jesus thought Isaiah wrote it, Paul thought Isaiah wrote it, Peter thought he did and John and James thought he wrote it, I kind of figure that they may have known a little more about who wrote it than some character that thinks he is the world's greatest expert here in the

last few years. Isaiah is referred to by name 21 times and his prophecies are referred to 85 times in the New Testament. Isaiah is the most heavily quoted Old Testament prophet in the New Testament.

It's interesting that God bore extra witness of the one the critics want to dispute the most. It's like God just kind of “rubbed their face in it” by saying, ‘You are going to have to dispute not only Isaiah, but you are going to have to dispute everything that came afterwards.’

Isaiah's name means “God is salvation” and that seems to be the main theme of the book. The book of Isaiah has a lot of prophecies dealing with the Messiah. Many of the most striking prophecies of Tomorrow's World are there in the book of Isaiah. The book of Isaiah contains the most graphic prophecies of the coming of Jesus Christ, the promise of the Messiah, the prophecy that Christ would be born of a virgin, the prophecy that He would give His life as a ransom and of His scourging. All of these things are prophesied in the book of Isaiah, as well as the prophecies of Tomorrow's World, the prophecies that He would come as King of kings and Lord of lords. The book of Isaiah is filled with a lot of prophecies that really focus our attention on the fact that God is the only salvation; that's really the meaning of the name Isaiah, “God is salvation.” That's what Isaiah's message focuses on. Over and over it focuses on showing us why we need God's salvation and what we need God to save us from.

Part of the book of Isaiah is an indictment, but the other part of it is the good news that lies ahead. You have the indictment, the consequences of the indictment and the long-term results of salvation that God brings about. This is the thrust of Isaiah.

Jeremiah began his ministry, as I mentioned, a couple of decades prior to the time that Judah began to go into captivity. Jeremiah began his ministry 100 years or more later than Isaiah did.

Jeremiah 1:1-2, he began his ministry during the 13th year of King Josiah, which would date it to 625 B.C. and about 60 years after the death of Isaiah. Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry when he was quite young; tradition says he was age 17. Notice Jeremiah's response when God told him he was being ordained a prophet.

Jeremiah 1:5-6, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; and I ordained you a prophet to the nations.’ Then said I: ‘Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth.’”

I would like to note a couple of things about Jeremiah and why God used someone this young. Jeremiah began his ministry during the 13th year of King Josiah. Josiah, during his 13th year, would have only been 21 years old himself.

In 2 Chronicles 34:1-3, we are told Josiah was eight years old when he became king and he began to really seek God in the eighth year of his reign (age 16). His 13th year (Jeremiah 1:2) would have been when he was 21 years old. This is when he really began to institute his reforms. Even though Jeremiah was quite young, he would have been close to the same age or perhaps four years younger than Josiah.

Jeremiah 1:1, Jeremiah's father was Hilkiah, the high priest who was responsible for serving as the guardian of the young King Josiah during his growing-up years. Hilkiah was responsible for a lot of the teaching and training that Josiah had. Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah the priest, would have sort of grown up with Josiah. Here was a young king, and God then began to work through Jeremiah when he was quite a young man. Jewish tradition says he was age 17, and that would certainly be in line with the statement of verse 6.

I want to point out that so many times the concept that we have of prophets is an elderly man with a long gray beard leaning on a staff. I think all of us, at some time, have that concept. I think a lot of times our young people kind of have the idea that God's prophets were all elderly men with long gray beards, kind of leaning on their staff because that was the only way they could get around. There were some of God's prophets that continued to function well on up into their later years, and certainly some of God's prophets reached a very elderly age. But the point is that some of God's prophets were very young, some of them were middle age and some of them were elderly. Even some of God's prophets who may have functioned well on into their latter years began to be servants of God when they were very young.

In other words, you don't have to be old to be a servant of God and you don't have to be young. You can be a servant of God at any age. You can be a servant of God as a teenager, a young adult, middle-aged adult or as an elderly person. And I think it's important for us to understand that, in a sense, there are role models and servants of God in every stage of life. Whatever stage of life we find ourselves, some of God's servants were also at that point. The idea that young people, by default, have to be out being little hellions and

“sowing their wild oats” is not always the case. There is an alternative. That's not what Jeremiah was doing when he was that age. That's not what Josiah was doing at that age.

It's interesting that Josiah was one of the most remarkable kings in all the history of Judah. The reforms he carried out were some of the most thoroughgoing. He exemplified all of the zeal and the idealism of youth. God has worked through young people, just as He has worked through older people. Jeremiah started out as a very young prophet, and instead of a long gray beard, he may not have even had a beard at all. He continued his ministry for a number of years, and in the latter period of the book, in the latter period of his prophecy, he was a very elderly man. He had served God for many, many years. He had served God very faithfully over an extended period of time.

Josiah came to the throne at a very crucial time in the history of Judah. The wicked King Manasseh had ruled for a long period of time. Things had really gotten in a mess. It was at the point that God was ready to remove Judah. The only thing that stood between Judah and captivity was a zealous young king by the name of Josiah. God was so impressed by the zeal of Josiah that He made the promise that He would protect Judah as long as Josiah lived. When Josiah died, “the show was just about over.” God ceased protecting Judah. He allowed the nation to reap the consequences of what it had sown. But it shows, in a sense, what difference one person can make. In the case of Josiah, God looked at his attitude. He looked at his zeal. God looked at what Josiah did and He took note of it. God honored Josiah's obedience and zeal and spared the nation during his lifetime.

The reforms of Josiah are recorded in great detail in 2 Chronicles 34 and 35. We won't go into them at this time, but Josiah had been greatly influenced by the priest Hilkiah who was the father of Jeremiah. Hilkiah presided over the priestly part of the reforms launched by King Josiah; Josiah, in turn, was spurred on by Jeremiah. These two young men grew into early adulthood, undoubtedly having known each other and spending time together as boys when Jeremiah's father was the guardian of the young king. In many ways, the boys would have spent time together, kind of growing up together. This was an example of two young people who were a very positive influence on one another and who brought out the best in one another. They made a remarkable combination.

Jeremiah's name means "the Eternal establishes" or "the Eternal founds." This is very directly tied in with the commission that God gave to Jeremiah. The commission is recorded in Jeremiah 1.

Jeremiah 1:10, "'See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant.'" We are going to see, when we get to the book of Jeremiah, the remarkable aspect of Jeremiah's prophecy. Because, you see, a very remarkable event occurred during Jeremiah's lifetime.

The beginning of his lifetime was marked by the reign of King Josiah—a righteous king—the last righteous king of Judah. The man for whom, in a sense, God spared the nation for a period of time. But in the aftermath of Josiah's death (within a matter of a few years), the Babylonians invaded and Jerusalem was taken in 604 B.C. Over the next 17 or 18 years, the Babylonians dominated until finally Nebuchadnezzar came, completely destroyed Jerusalem and destroyed the temple in 587 B.C. He burned the temple to the ground and took all the rest of the Jews that were left. He had taken a small group to Babylon in 604 B.C. He had come back in 596 B.C. and this time he burned the city and burned the temple. First he looted it of the things of value; then he burned the temple and the city and finally took everybody to Babylon. He killed the last king, Zedekiah.

Now, if you remember, God had made a promise to David.

1 Kings 2:4, "...He said, 'you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'"

1 Kings 9:5, "'then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, 'You shall not fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.''"

Here, during the lifetime of Jeremiah, outwardly, visibly, as it would appear, that throne ceased. God preserved it when the ten tribes rebelled against the house of Solomon (1 Kings 12). God established and continued that throne in Jerusalem reigning over Judah. But here was Judah gone into captivity, and here was the last king killed. Did God's promise fail? No, because when we look at the book of Jeremiah and when we look at his contemporary Ezekiel, we will see the role that Jeremiah played in transferring the throne of David from Jerusalem to the location that it was set. If you want to be specific, it was actually transferred from Jerusalem to Tara, Ireland.

You've heard of Tara, the famous plantation in the movie "Gone with the Wind." Well, it takes its name from the ancient capital of Ireland. Tara was the location of the ancient high kings of Ireland. Then it was later transferred from Tara, Ireland to Scone, Scotland. That's where the term "stone of scone" comes from because it was later transferred from Scone, Scotland down to London, England. It was overturned three times: once, to Ireland; the second time, to Scotland; and the third time, to England. We will notice some of that when we go through the book of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was set over nations and over kingdoms. He was set to root out, to pull down, to destroy and throw down, but he was also set to build and to plant. We are going to see what Jeremiah rooted out, pulled down, destroyed and threw down and what he built and planted. It is a remarkable story.

Jeremiah 1:1, Jeremiah was born in the priestly city of Anathoth, which is a short distance from Jerusalem. He was born near the end of the reign of the wicked King Manasseh.

The period of Manasseh's reign was a period void of an active prophet, though evidently, there were some like Jeremiah's father Hilkiah who continued to maintain the truth privately. The temple, of course, was closed during most of those years, and there wasn't an active prophetic ministry. Manasseh, evidently, put Isaiah to death at the beginning of his reign, and there wasn't an active, prophetic ministry that was done openly. But the truth was maintained privately, and Jeremiah was the next significant prophet raised up. Jeremiah took an active part in helping King Josiah launch his reform movement. Throughout the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah warns against the rampant sins of the people: adultery, idolatry, violence and oppression.

Now, with the death of Josiah, Jeremiah composed the book of Lamentations. It was a lament for King Josiah—the last righteous king of Judah—but it was also a lament for the nation because the prophecy had been made that God would protect the nation of Judah as long as Josiah lived. The obvious implication of that is, 'When Josiah dies, you had better watch out!' And that's what happened. It was a lament, not simply for the death of this righteous king, but for the captivity that was going to come upon this sinful nation.

The calamities that came upon ancient Judah in Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. (prophesied in the book of Lamentations) were,

in a sense, duplicated again centuries later in 70 A.D. when the Romans came in, destroyed Jerusalem and destroyed the second temple. Both of those destructions of Jerusalem and the temple were simply a type of the Great Tribulation, which is to come. Jesus said in Matthew 24:21 that is going to be a time of trouble such as has not been since the world began. Clearly, Jesus makes it plain in Matthew 24 that the events that happened to Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D. were a type of the end-time events that are going to happen to His people.

Lamentations becomes a very prophetic book of the Great Tribulation—of the destruction and end-time captivity. We are not going to go through Lamentations at this time, but we will pick it up a little later in the proper sequence. We need to understand that Jeremiah wrote it and he wrote it in the context of King Josiah's death.

Jeremiah's message of captivity and destruction for his nation brought him into great reproach from the kings that came after Josiah. It brought him great reproach from the royal court and from the citizens of Judah because people don't like to hear the truth when the truth is unpleasant; Jeremiah told it the way it was.

Jeremiah was an older contemporary of Ezekiel and Daniel. He corresponded with Daniel. There's direct reference to that in Daniel 9.

Daniel 9:1-2, "In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books [understood by letters] the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord, given through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem." Daniel came to understand, as a result of correspondence, what this 70-year prophecy Jeremiah had made was all about. Evidently, the question had been, "What was the full significance of it, and when did it begin?"

Jeremiah 25:11-12 was a prophecy that Jeremiah made of a 70-year captivity on Judah.

Ezekiel flourished at a little later time. Ezekiel, we are going to see, went captive with the second invasion of Nebuchadnezzar in 596 B.C. Jeremiah continued to prophesy in Jerusalem through this period of time.

Jeremiah 29:1, let's notice, "Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders who were carried away captive—to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom

Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon." See, Jeremiah wrote a letter to the ones that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive. This group would have included Daniel and Ezekiel.

Jeremiah 29:10, "For thus says the Lord: after seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place." This was the 70-year prophecy that Jeremiah made. Jeremiah greatly influenced Ezekiel and Daniel. Ezekiel and Daniel were in Babylon. Jeremiah was in Jerusalem. He was older than they were. They both went captive as very young men. Daniel was certainly even younger than Ezekiel. Jeremiah wrote to the group in Babylon and instructed them in certain things concerning this prophecy. Daniel makes reference that he sought for a number of years to clearly understand exactly what was meant. Since Nebuchadnezzar had invaded several times, what time do we start? Which invasion begins the countdown of the 70 years? What was the full sense of it?

Northern Israel had gone into captivity long before Jeremiah wrote. Jeremiah focuses in using the backdrop of Judah and Jerusalem in his day, over 100 years after the northern tribes had gone into captivity. Jeremiah uses that as a backdrop to illustrate that the events that transpired at that time served as a parallel to events that were going to occur in the end time. There are many things in Jeremiah that clearly focus in on the end time, on the final punishment and captivity and then the subsequent renewal of God's people in this end time. The things that ancient Judah went through at the time Jeremiah wrote are a parallel to events that our people are going through in the end time. In effect, what you have is the same sins which lead to the same consequences and the same punishment. But you will ultimately see the conclusion and the answer that Jeremiah records.

I mentioned that Jeremiah was an older contemporary of Ezekiel and Daniel. After the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C., Jeremiah took the king's daughter from Jerusalem, through Egypt and ultimately to Ireland. That's where he finished his prophetic ministry. We will go into some of that when we go through the book of Jeremiah.

A great deal of Isaiah's prophetic ministry centered on the time of King Hezekiah. He was a contemporary of at least one righteous king. Isaiah and Hezekiah were a very important combination in the history of ancient Judah.

Jeremiah and Josiah were another important combination in the history of Judah and played a major role.

Let's notice briefly about **Ezekiel**. Ezekiel, as Jeremiah, was of the priestly family. Ezekiel's name means "God will strengthen." He was taken captive in the second invasion of Nebuchadnezzar in 596 B.C., and he spent the remainder of his life among the Jewish captives near Babylon. Jeremiah and Isaiah both wrote in the vicinity of Jerusalem. Ezekiel wrote in the captivity; Ezekiel wrote at a time after the captivity had become a reality. The final destruction of Jerusalem had not occurred at the time that Ezekiel began his ministry. Ezekiel's ministry continued for a period of a little over 20 years. The complete destruction of Jerusalem did not occur until several years after Ezekiel's ministry began. Ezekiel's ministry was totally limited to the time he was in captivity in the area of Babylon.

As mentioned, he went into captivity in the second invasion in 596 B.C. He spent the remainder of his life in that area. His years of prophecy were from 591 B.C. until 569 B.C. We are not told what happened to Ezekiel. The book just simply ends. Jewish tradition says his fellow captives murdered him.

From Jeremiah 29:1, we would conclude that Ezekiel was at least partially instructed and influenced by Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 29:1-2, we are told, "Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders who were carried away captive—to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon. (This happened after Jeconiah the king, the queen mother, the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem.)" This was the second captivity of 596 B.C.

We are told Ezekiel was a priest. We will notice here in the beginning of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 1:3, "the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was upon him there." Ezekiel was a priest. He was in captivity near Babylon. Now, Ezekiel had a very clear-cut mission. He was assigned to be a watchman to the house of Israel.

Ezekiel 2:3, "And He said to me: 'Son of man, I send you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me;'"

Ezekiel 3:4, "And He said to me: 'Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them.'"

Verse 17, "'Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; ...'"

There's one thing about that. The house of Israel had been in captivity for well over 100 years when Ezekiel wrote. They had been in captivity for almost 140 years when Ezekiel wrote. Now, why would you write a message warning of captivity to people who had been taken captive 120 or 130 years earlier? Clearly, the message was not for them. You see, Ezekiel never delivered his message to the house of Israel. Ezekiel wrote down his message. Ezekiel's message is for the house of Israel today!

Some of you who remember back, remember the radio broadcast over the years. You remember Mr. Herbert Armstrong going through the book of Ezekiel and emphasizing the message of the watchman. The message of Ezekiel was clearly a message for today because Ezekiel never left the area of Babylon. He was there with a bunch of Jewish captives hundreds of miles from where Israel had been taken captive.

The tribes of Israel had been settled, not down by Babylon in southern Mesopotamia by the River Chebar, but they had been settled where? 2 Kings 17:6 says they were settled by the Assyrians in the cities of the Medes. They were settled up by the River Gozan, which is up in the area between the Black and the Caspian Sea—a little south of where all the fighting is going on right now in the Soviet Union. Azerbaijan is kind of between the Black and the Caspian Sea. It is north of where the Israelites were settled. The Israelites were a little south of that mountain range but in kind of that vicinity up north of the Tigris-Euphrates area in the cities of the Medes.

The Medes eventually migrated from there, up through the heartland of the Soviet Union and are in the area that we would call the Ukraine today. The Israelites, centered there around the Black Sea, later crossed the Black Sea and went up through the heartland of Europe. This was the invasion of the Gauls—the coming of various tribes into northern Europe.

Ezekiel never went to that area. At the time Ezekiel wrote this, he was in the boundaries of a totally different empire. What do you think the likelihood of Ezekiel coming up and saying, 'Listen, I just got a message from God. You guys

are going to have to turn me loose because I cannot be a slave here in Babylon anymore. God just told me that I have this message and I need to take a hike to about 200 miles from here. There are these people who need to hear what I have. Turn me loose because God's given me a job.' –“Fat chance” getting loose on that. What's the likelihood? Do you think they said to Ezekiel, 'Oh, you can't be a slave here in Babylon if God told you to go up there. Well, we will surely turn you loose.'

No, Ezekiel wrote his message! That's why Ezekiel wrote it down. It is a message that applies for our time, our day and on out ahead of us. There are some very remarkable things in the book of Ezekiel, but the real impact, the real message of the book of Ezekiel, is for the house of Israel today. The warnings of a future captivity had no immediate relevance to a people already in captivity; that, of course, is what we see.

There's an awful lot in the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. As I mentioned, we are going to get into the book of Isaiah first. The questions will be dealing with the first 14 chapters of the book of Isaiah. That is what we will want to read and study by the next Bible study, as we begin to get into this.