



Session Eleven

THE PROPHETS
God's Human Messengers
(Part 2)

*Dear Lord,
Fill us with your Holy Spirit,
the uncreated and the perfect,
who spoke through the Law and through the Prophets and through
the Gospels, who came down upon the Jordan and preached through the
apostles and who lived in the saints.
Amen.*



Did You Know?

Ezekiel was asked by God to do quite a demonstration for the people. In a public square he had to lie down on his left side for 390 days, then on his right side for 40 days to symbolize the number of years Israel and Judah would spend in exile (respectively). Meanwhile, he was to live on very little food – mimicking a people in exile – and was to bake humble barley cakes on human dung. Talk about making a point! See Ezekiel 4 for the details.



In the Time of the Exile

As we noted in the last session, Jeremiah was one of three prophets who preached during the time of the exile in Babylonia. The other two are Ezekiel and Obadiah.

Obadiah

This very brief book (21 verses) indicates that the enemies of God's people will be judged at the last judgment. This is one of few references, in the words of the prophets, to the idea of a last judgment at the end of time. Obadiah specifically talks about the Edomites, who were ferocious enemies of the Hebrew people. Edom and its people have completely disappeared from history. There is a haunting reminder that they must once have been a great civilization—a great city full of temples cut out of huge rocks, which is called Petra and which was once the Edomite capital.

Ezekiel

This book was written between 593 and 573 B.C. Ezekiel was one of the captives taken to Babylonia, and he describes Babylonia's conquest of Judah as God's judgment on the sins of His people.

But Ezekiel was not only a “scold” to the people. He was given some wonderful visions of God's intentions to bring all people, both Jew and Gentile, into His Kingdom. Ezekiel had one vision which seems to be a promise of resurrection for those who have died. Read this in *Ezekiel 37:1-14*.

Ezekiel's visions were a gift from God to the Hebrews in exile. They took comfort and courage from Ezekiel's descriptions of the things God had shown him. But these visions are also a gift to us, and to everyone in the world, because the promises they make are for every human being.

Group Bible Study: Ezekiel 37:1-14

1. Read the passage together and list the characters.
 2. Describe Ezekiel's vision: Where is it taking place? What might it look like?
 3. Describe the vision, step by step (verses 1-10).
 4. What is the interpretation of the vision (verses 11-14)? Speak about the symbolism of *bones*, *breath*, and *graves*.
 5. How might we, as Christians, interpret this vision today?
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The Prophets of the Period After the Exile

You remember that when the Persian king defeated the Babylonians, he allowed the Hebrews to return to their homeland of Palestine. Not all of them returned, but many did. We can now look at the prophets who preached after the exile, both to those who returned and those who did not.

Haggai and Zechariah

Having been in exile, many Jews realized that they could worship God in places other than the Temple in Jerusalem. You remember, too, that Jeremiah had told the people they must not rely on the Temple or any other building to save them. But the Jews who returned to Jerusalem also knew that in their circumstances, rebuilding the Temple was still very important as a visible sign of God's presence among the people. It was also a visible sign that the people were putting God at the center of their lives.

Haggai and Zechariah urged the people on to rebuild the Temple, when their energy and enthusiasm waned.

Zechariah also has some clear prophecies about the way the Savior would come into the world. Read *Zechariah 9:9*. Write here the words that relate to what happened on Palm Sunday:

Malachi

The mid-fifth century B.C. was a hard time in Palestine. There was drought, famine, and the same grumbling discontentment that the people had felt when wandering in the desert with Moses. Malachi warned the people not to complain, but to love and worship God with enthusiastic hearts.

Jonah

This book was written in the fifth century B.C., but it is set in the 8th century. Unlike the other prophetic books, it contains no predictions or warnings. Instead it shows us by means of a story that God's salvation is for all people, not just the Hebrews.

And the book doesn't feature a prophet like Isaiah or Jeremiah, doing God's will no matter what the consequences. No, Jonah is trying very hard to escape God and His will. God is asking him to go to the city of Nineveh—remember that this was the capital of Babylonia—and Jonah has no desire to help the enemies and conquerors of his people by calling them to repentance as God wants him to. Finally, Jonah does do God's will but learns a lot about himself and God's character.

The Armenian Angle

Ezekiel 37:1-14 is read in the Armenian Church on Holy Saturday, as we prepare for the resurrection of Christ. Like Him, we will die. But also like Him, we will be resurrected. We will come into the "land of Israel"(v.12) and be in "our own land"(v.14)—these are references to the Kingdom of God. One of the beautiful stained-glass windows in St. Vartan Cathedral depicts this scene; above it a phoenix, the mythological bird that rises from the ashes, is pictured. Both images are meant to echo the Armenian genocide and Christian hope.

Word Watch

Temple: the holy place of sacrifice and pilgrimage in Jerusalem for Jews everywhere. The Temple was destroyed in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians, rebuilt, and then destroyed again by the Romans in 70 A.D. With the Temple's final destruction, the Torah became the most important expression of faith for the Jews.





Joel

Written during the late 5th or early 4th century B.C., this book states that our salvation is in our own hands. Faith and obedience will save us; ungodliness will mean destruction.

Daniel

Daniel lived during the time of the exile in Babylonia. Some of this book was probably written by him, though much of it was written later. The book's purpose was to build up the hope and courage of the exiled people. It is the story of four young men—Daniel and his three friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah—who are carried off to Babylon and who are chosen to serve in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar. Despite every temptation and threat, they refuse to eat the pagan food or observe the pagan worship practices of their captors. Even when they are given Babylonian names they won't conform to Babylonian ways. (Their story is read on Christmas and Easter Eves in the Armenian Church.)

Daniel is a wise and talented young man who earns the king's trust and favor by being such a good administrator, and by being able to interpret the king's dreams. He rises to a position of power and asks his friends to help him govern, but jealous rivals denounce him and his friends to the king.

God saves His faithful servants from every dire plan these jealous people can think of to destroy them. What do you think is the "message" to the exiled Hebrews? Is there a message for us?

Baruch

Jeremiah's secretary, Baruch, praises wisdom as a divine principle which can lead people to God. This book is a deuterocanonical book. As we saw in a previous session, that means that it is of the "second canon." Though it is included in the Greek version of the Old Testament, it was not part of the original Hebrew scripture.

Looking In

Jonah not only ignored what God was asking him to do, he hopped a boat and tried to get as far as possible in the opposite direction! What is something God might ask you to do that you would have trouble doing? Give your allowance to a poor child? Spend your time in a certain way? Think of one specific change of lifestyle or attitude that would be very challenging.

Quick Quiz #11

① to ⑤ **Select the right answer from the list of prophets below.**

1. His book contains a reference to the concept of a last judgment at the end of time. _____
2. This prophet had a vision about bones. _____
3. His book has a reference to a king "riding on a donkey." _____
4. This prophet tried to run away from God. _____
5. His book contains the story of four young men exiled in Babylon. _____

Ezekiel, Obadiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Jonah, Joel, Daniel

⑥ to ⑩ **Fill in the blanks:**

Sometime later, I felt the Lord's power take control of me, and his Spirit carried me to a valley full of 6. _____. The Lord showed me all around, and everywhere I looked I saw bones that were 7 _____ out. He said, 'Ezekiel, son of man, can these bones come back to 8 _____?' I replied, "Lord God, only you can answer that." He then told me to say: Dry bones, listen to what the lord is saying to you, "I, the Lord God, will put 9 _____ in you, and once again you will live. I will wrap you with muscles and skin and breathe life into you. Then you will know that I am the 10 _____."

