

# The Major Prophets

The seventeen prophetic books comprise about one-fourth of Scripture and are crucial from a theological and historical point of view. Yet their message and meaning evade more people than any other section of the Bible, principally because of neglect.

The second division of the Hebrew Bible was known as the Prophets and consisted of the Former Prophets and Latter Prophets. The Former Prophets were actually the historical books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. These books chronicled God's dealings with the theocratic nation from the time of Joshua to the Babylonian captivity. Thus, they furnish the background to the writing prophets.

The Latter Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets. The term "latter" speaks more of their place in the canon than of chronology. These prophets left written records of their ministry, but the oral prophets (e.g., Nathan, Ahijah, Iddo, Jehu, Elijah, Elisha, Oded, Shemaiah, Azariah, Hanani, Jahaziel, and Huldah) left no records that survived. The writing prophets were later divided into the Major and Minor Prophets as we know them today. The Major Prophets were so designated because of their greater length (Lamentations excepted).

**Isaiah** - This pinnacle of the prophets has a twofold message of condemnation (1-39) and consolation (40-66). Isaiah analyzes the sins of Judah and pronounces God's judgment on the nation. He broadens his scope to include judgment on the surrounding nations and moves to universal judgment followed by blessing. After an historical parenthesis concerning King Hezekiah, Isaiah consoles the people with a message of future salvation and restoration. *Yahweh* is the sovereign Savior who will rescue His people.

**Jeremiah** - Judah had reached the depths of moral and spiritual decay, and Jeremiah was called to the heartbreaking and unpopular ministry of declaring the certain judgment of God against the nation. Jeremiah faithfully ministered despite rejection and persecution, and the dreaded day finally came. Judah's defiance of God's holiness led to her downfall, but God graciously promised to establish a new covenant with His people.

**Lamentations** - This beautifully structured series of five lament poems is Judah's funeral for the fallen city of Jerusalem. After his forty years of warning, Jeremiah's awful words came true. His sorrow is obvious in his vivid descriptions of the defeat, destruction, and desolation of Jerusalem.

**Ezekiel** - The prophet Ezekiel ministered to the Jewish captives in Babylon before and after the fall of Jerusalem. Like Jeremiah, he had to convince the people that the city was doomed, and that the Captivity would not be brief. Ezekiel also described the fate of Judah's foes and ended with a great apocalyptic vision of Judah's future.

**Daniel** - This crucial book abounds with detailed prophecies and visions of the future. It outlines God's sovereign plan for the gentile nations (2-7) and moves on to a portrait of Israel during the time of gentile domination (8-12). At a time when the Jews had little hope, Daniel provided encouragement by revealing God's power and plans for their future.