

# Understanding the Bible

## OLD TESTAMENT



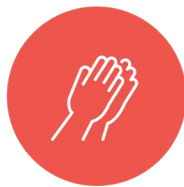
### PENTATEUCH



### HISTORICAL



### WISDOM



### PROPHETIC

Genesis	Exodus	Leviticus	Numbers	Deuteronomy
Joshua	Judges	Ruth	1 Samuel	2 Samuel
1 Kings	2 Kings	1 Chronicles	2 Chronicles	Ezra
Nehemiah	Esther	Job	Psalms	Proverbs
Ecclesiastes	Song of Solomon	Isaiah	Jeremiah	Lamentations
Ezekiel	Daniel	Hosea	Joel	Amos
Obadiah	Jonah	Micah	Nahum	Habakkuk
Zephaniah	Haggai	Zechariah	Malachi	

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## NEW TESTAMENT



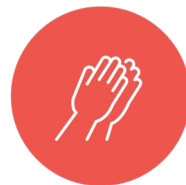
### GOSPELS



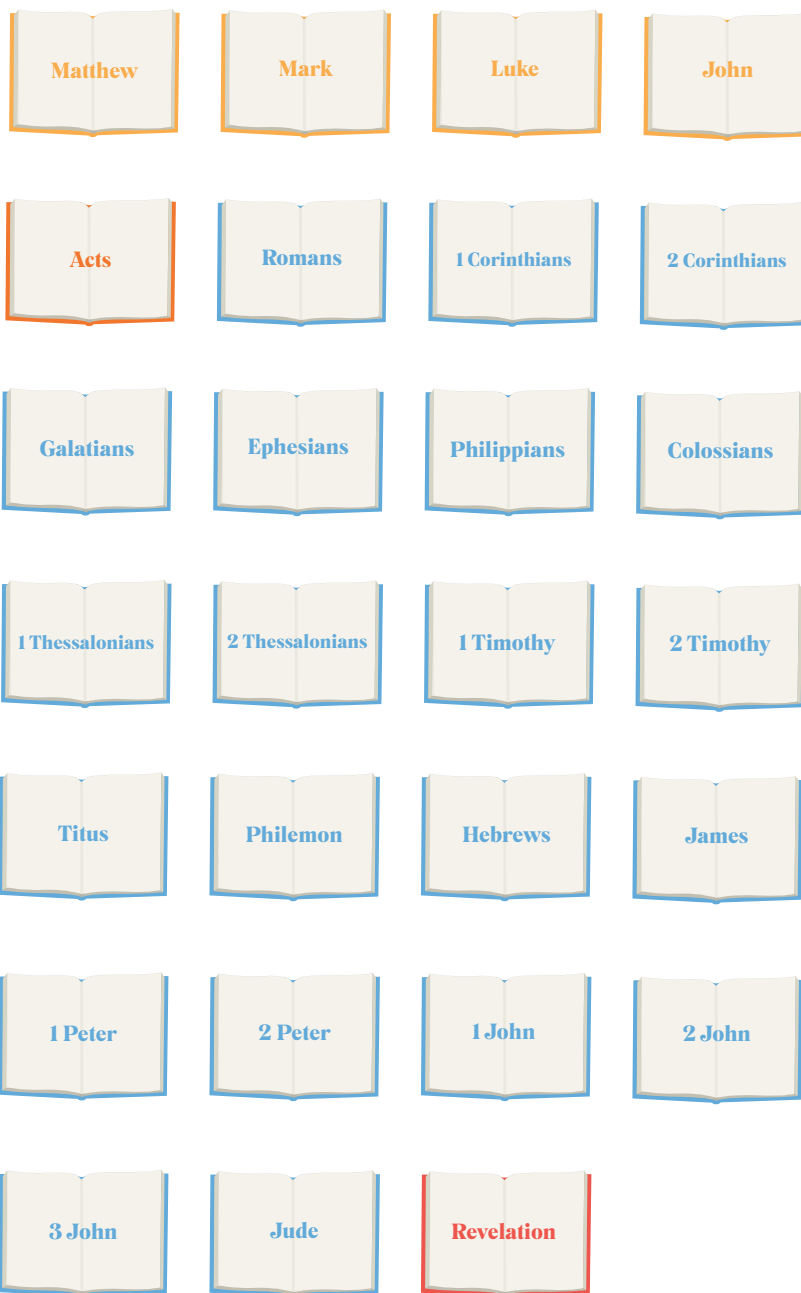
### HISTORICAL



### LETTERS



### PROPHETIC



# Major and Minor Prophets

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT



**PROPHETIC**

**Isaiah**

**Jeremiah**

**Lamentations**

**Ezekiel**

**Daniel**

**Hosea**

**Joel**

**Amos**

**Obadiah**

**Jonah**

**Micah**

**Nahum**

**Habakkuk**

**Zephaniah**

**Haggai**

**Zechariah**

**Malachi**

# The Major Prophets

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**SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 9:6**

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## **Bible Readings:**

*Isaiah 52:13–53:12;*

*Jeremiah 25;*

*Lamentations 3:23*

This week, we are going to look at the last category of Old Testament books: the prophets. Each prophet is widely accepted as the author of the book named after him. The specific role of the prophets was to call Israel to repentance when they sinned. The prophets warned God's people of judgment if they didn't stop turning their back on God, all while reminding them that God will extend them mercy and hope and future restoration.

Today, let's look at an overview of the books that make up the major prophets:

## **ISAIAH**

From this book, we learn that Isaiah was married and had two sons (Isaiah 7:3, 8:3). Isaiah prophesied from 739–681 BC during the reign of four kings of Judah—Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. By the time he started prophesying, the people of Judah were worshipping God on the surface, but inwardly they had abandoned their faith. Through Isaiah, God prophesied a series of judgments to turn the heart of his people back to himself, as well as predictions about the future savior of Israel. Of all of the Old Testament books, Isaiah gives the clearest picture of the future Messiah's birth (7:14) and his death (52:13–53:12).<sup>ix</sup>

## **JEREMIAH AND LAMENTATIONS**

Jeremiah's ministry began in 627 BC and lasted until around 582 BC. His prophecies included the prediction of the Babylonian captivity, during which the Jews would be

carried to Babylon as exiles because of their rebellion against God (Jeremiah 25). In spite of this, God promised to return them to the land and to give them a good future. That future included a time when God would make a new covenant with the nation in which his laws would be written on their hearts (Hebrews 8:10–12). In addition to the book that bears his name, Jeremiah also likely wrote Lamentations. In Lamentations, the author wept over the city of Jerusalem, which had been invaded in 586 BC.<sup>x</sup> Deeply anguished, he lamented over Judah’s sin that resulted in the destruction of its land. In the midst of his sorrow, the author still expressed hope in a faithful God whose mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:23).

#### EZEKIEL

Ezekiel prophesied during Judah’s exile in Babylon and lived in Tel-Abib, nearly one hundred miles south of Babylon.<sup>xi</sup> Many of Ezekiel’s prophecies concerned judgment for the sins that God’s people had committed as well as judgment against the nation’s enemies. The latter half of Ezekiel includes prophecies of Judah’s restoration and the return of God’s glory among his people.

#### DANIEL

Like Ezekiel, Daniel also lived in Babylon during the Jews’ exile. Daniel can be divided into two sections. The first section is narrative, recounting the encounters of Daniel and his three friends with the powerful kings of Babylon, Media, and Persia (Daniel 1–6). The second half of the book contains visions of the future, as it relates to Israel and the world (Daniel 7–12).

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**God used prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel to deliver messages of warning, comfort, hope, and restoration to his people. In what ways does God communicate with you?**

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**The specific role of the \_\_\_\_\_ was to call Israel to \_\_\_\_\_ when they sinned.**

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# The Minor Prophets

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**“Be glad, O children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given the early rain for your vindication; he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the latter rain, as before.**

**JOEL 2:23**

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As we unpack the minor prophets today, don't think they are not as important or as good as the major prophets! The only thing separating a minor prophet from a major prophet is that a major prophet simply means there was more content recorded from their lives and prophecies. That being said, let's take a look at an overview of the minor prophets:

## HOSEA

Hosea, a contemporary of Isaiah, lived around 755–715 BC.<sup>xii</sup> Hosea's personal life was closely connected to his prophetic message. His marriage to an unfaithful wife represented Israel's unfaithfulness to God.

## Bible Readings:

*Jonah 4:10–11;*

*Joel 2:23–27*

## JOEL

Scholars have had much trouble identifying the time period in which the book was written. Joel prophesied judgment on Judah and predicted, in detail, the still-to-come day of the Lord.

## AMOS

A shepherd from Tekoa in the southern kingdom, Amos prophesied against a prideful Israel (northern kingdom). The nation looked out for its own interests and refused to take care of the poor and oppressed.<sup>xiii</sup> Because of their failure to uphold God's justice, he pronounced judgment on them.

## OBADIAH

Obadiah is one of the few books primarily concerned with judgment on other nations outside of Israel. In the shortest book of the Old Testament, Obadiah prophesied punishment on the kingdom of Edom because of the way it treated the Israelites.

## JONAH

A reluctant Jonah delivered a message of judgment to the people of Nineveh. As Jonah suspected, the people repented and God spared the city, angering Jonah. He wanted to see God's wrath on his nation's enemies. At the end of the book, God reminded Jonah that he could have mercy on whomever he chose.

## MICAH

A contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea, Micah prophesied under the kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.<sup>xiv</sup> Micah's prophecies also predicted the place of Jesus's birth in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) and the details of Jesus's kingdom after his return (Micah 4:2).

## NAHUM

Nahum prophesied during the reign of the Manasseh, a wicked king of Judah, likely between 663 and 654 BC.<sup>xv</sup> His message was directed against Nineveh, the nation that God sent Jonah to years earlier. Because the nation had returned to its sin, Nahum predicted God's inevitable judgment on them.

## HABAKKUK

Habakkuk prophesied around the beginning of king Jehoiakim's reign (609–598 BC). The book records a conversation between the prophet and God. The prophet saw all of the evil occurring in Judah and wondered why



God seemed to allow the unjust to remain unpunished. However, God answered and declared that punishment was coming in his time. Soon after, Babylon ransacked the nation of Judah.<sup>xvi</sup>

#### ZEPHANIAH

Zephaniah, great-great grandson of Hezekiah, prophesied during the rule of Josiah from 640 to 609 BC.<sup>xvii</sup> Like Joel, Zephaniah predicted, in detail, the coming day of the Lord that would eventually bring restoration of God's glory to his people.

#### HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH

Haggai and Zechariah were contemporaries and their messages concerned the rebuilding of the temple under the guidance of Zerubbabel, a government official of royal lineage. As the people rebuilt the temple, God promised current and future blessings.

#### MALACHI

By the time of Malachi's prophecies, the temple had been rebuilt but Judah's spiritual appetite was lacking. Through Malachi, God called his people to return to faithfully serving him.

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**The minor prophets often detail God's warning of judgment. Still, how do you think they can help us to see God's love for his people and his desire to be near us?**

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**The only thing separating a \_\_\_\_\_ prophet from a \_\_\_\_\_ prophet is that a major prophet simply means there was more \_\_\_\_\_ recorded from their lives and prophecies.**

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# What Do These Books Mean?

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## SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 61:1

### Bible Readings:

*Isaiah 53;*

*Isaiah 61:1–9;*

*Luke 4:16–21*

## BETTER DAYS TO COME

The prophetic books sounded the alarm and warned the kingdoms of Israel and Judah that God would not tolerate their sins. We see God's holiness on full display and the failure of his people to remain loyal to his covenant with them. Through the prophets, we see the heartbreaking results of abandoning God and his ways. What insights we can gain from the Jews' rebellion! No matter how much God loves his people and wants to dwell them, he refuses to allow them to continue in sin without addressing it.

In the midst of the worst days of Israel's history, much of it brought on by their own disobedience, we also see some of God's brightest promises. Parallel to pronouncements of judgment, these books also heralded the good news. God's people had done their very worst. Still, he promised his very best.

God communicated through his prophets that better days were coming. A Messiah would come who would forever return the hearts of the people back to their God (Isaiah 53). The prophecies concerning the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah find their fulfillment in the New Testament. These messages of hope motivated the people of the Old Testament to live in anticipation of God's future salvation. Hundreds of years after Isaiah's prophecy concerning the Lord's anointed one, Jesus read from Isaiah 61 and declared, "Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). As we read these messages, we can rejoice in the God who forgives sins and extends his mercy to all who will call upon him.

## A GLORIOUS FUTURE

We know the rest of the story and enjoy the salvation that God had long promised. We not only study these books of prophecy to understand how they relate to our past and our present, but we study them to understand our future. God also gave the prophets vision and insight into the far distant future, when the Messiah will return a second time, destroying sin and death and reigning

forever as the everlasting King of Peace. One day, all of God's people across all times will live together in unity. God will be our God in every sense. He will wipe away all tears from our eyes, and we will serve him forever with joy.

Knowing that we have such a bright future gives us hope as we live out our days here on Earth. We continue to study his Word so that we can live with intentionality and in anticipation of his return.

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**How often do you think about Jesus's return? How can you live with even more intentionality as you wait for his return?**

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**God communicated through his prophets that \_\_\_\_\_ days were coming.**

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# What Do You Observe?

## STUDYING THE BOOKS OF PROPHECY

Each category of the Old Testament has its own literary rules and characteristics. The prophetic books often carry messages that have dual meanings, one for the present and one for the future. One message was meant for the people in their time and place, while another message had a “not yet” aspect. Some of these messages were fulfilled in the person of Christ, whereas others are still yet to come. In addition, the prophetic books use imagery, symbolism, and metaphors that uniquely characterize this section of the Old Testament. It is important that we know how to properly interpret Bible prophecy so that we can accurately determine the intended meaning of the author’s writing. As we become familiar with the passages that are referred to as prophecy, we notice recurring symbols, numbers, and imagery that provide a blueprint for understanding God’s Word revealed through his prophets. We can then turn to Bible study aids as secondary sources that will help us interpret and apply Scripture to our lives.

## PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE: ISAIAH 25:7–8

Before we turn our attention to our practice verse for today, read the preceding chapter, Isaiah 24, to provide context for chapter 25. Also read the first verses of chapter 25 to gain context of what is happening within the chapter. Now, let’s make some observations about our verses:

“  
And he will swallow  
up on this mountain  
the covering that is  
cast over all peoples,  
the veil that is spread  
over all nations. He  
will swallow up death  
forever; and the Lord  
God will wipe away  
tears from all faces,  
and the reproach of  
his people he will  
take away from all the  
earth, for the Lord  
has spoken.

”

ISAIAH 25:7–8

Verse 7 begins with the conjunction “And”, which connects it to the content in verse 6. Someone, referred to as “he,” will swallow up two things on this mountain—the covering that is cast over all peoples and the veil that is spread over all nations.

Let’s highlight some keywords: swallow, covering, and veil.

**We can also add some questions to our observations. Who is “he” referring to? What does “this mountain” refer to? Remember, we are still observing. We don’t want to interpret anything yet.**

Once we have finished our observations in both verses, we can move on to interpretation and begin to answer some of the questions that we raised.

Let’s look at our question regarding “this mountain” in verse 7. The demonstrative adjective (“this”) implies that the mountain was previously mentioned. Looking through our prior contextual reading for clues, we identify the mountain as Mount Zion, named in Isaiah 24:23. Additionally, to whom does the pronoun “he” refer? From the context of verse 6, we understand that it is the Lord who will perform the actions of verses 7 and 8.

**What else do we observe and interpret in these verses?**

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*Once you have done your due diligence to arrive at an interpretation that is consistent with the context and agrees with the rest of Scripture, you are ready to explore how you can apply this passage to your life.*

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# What Does It Mean for You?

**And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken (Isaiah 25:7–8).**

As we actively respond to these Scriptures, the Spirit continues to cultivate our love for God and a longing to know his Word. In Isaiah, God promises his people a future in which he will permanently remove the reproach and devastating effects of sin. Nothing will

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**How does this passage motivate you to love God?**

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**To love those in your life?**

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**In what specific ways can you apply the promises  
expressed in Isaiah 25:7-8 to your life right now?**

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