

He Gave Us Prophets

LESSON
FIVE

Historical Analysis of
Prophecy
Faculty Forum



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He Gave Us Prophets

Lesson Five: Historical Analysis of Prophecy

Faculty Forum

With

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Dr. Todd Borger
Dr. David Correa
Mr. Sherif Atef Fahim
Dr. Russell T. Fuller

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Dr. Craig S. Keener
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Dr. Chip McDaniel
Dr. John Oswalt
Dr. Donna Petter
Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.
Dr. Seth Tarrer

Question 1:

What are the consequences of ignoring the historical situation of biblical prophecy?

Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

There's a very important sense in which the word of God, given through his prophets in the Old Testament, is timeless. And by that we mean that it was true when it was first given, it continues to be true, and it always will be true, because God does not make mistakes. His prophets don't make mistakes. They do not lie; they do not misrepresent him. That's what we mean when we say that the Bible is the word of God, and it's timeless. But we don't mean by that is that the Bible was not written for historical circumstances. In reality, the Bible was written very much to apply the basic beliefs of Israel to Israel at particular times. Israel believed fundamentally that God is the king and he's building his kingdom on the earth, and that he is going to administer this kingdom by means of his covenants. But Bible books, including the Prophets, take that basic belief about God's kingdom and that basic belief about God's covenants, and they apply those truths to the situations that the prophets were in. Even when they talk about distant future events, they're still talking about those events for the people to whom they're speaking in a particular situation. And so, to understand the timeless significance of biblical prophecies — what they mean for us today and what they will always mean for God's people — we have to go back to, as much as we can, go back to the days when the prophets first uttered those words, because they were not talking nonsense to people. They were talking about things that, at least, made at least some sense to the people to whom they were speaking. Even when Daniel says, "I can't understand this..." At one time he just throws his hands up and says, "I can't understand it!" Well, it was still true for him and still relevant for him because it was talking about things that were still going to give hope to Israel in the future and those sorts of things. He knew that something good was going to come from all of this. It was just, "I can't get the details of this. This is beyond me right now." And that's the way it is with prophecy very often. It's timeless in its significance. It's always the eternal word of God. But at the same time, even when the original audience could not quite get the details of what was being said, it

still impacted them. And for us to understand how it should impact us, we need to go back and understand how it was first designed to impact them.

Dr. Craig S. Keener

If we ignore the historical situation of biblical prophecy we can sometimes come up with strange interpretations. For example, you have in Scripture, sometimes it talks about “the abomination of desolation.” Well, the principle is repeatable. I mean, when Israel sinned, their temple would often be desecrated or destroyed. It happened more than once in history. But sometimes, we read those things as if they’re specific future predictions, and in the context, like in Matthew 24, for example, it seems to be speaking to some things that would happen within that generation. You have some other examples where the ignoring of historical context can make some really serious, even economic difficulties. For example, in Deuteronomy 33:24 you have Moses’ blessing of the tribes, and at one point it speaks of oil in the region of Asher. So, a few decades ago some Christian oilmen said, “Hey, it talks about oil in the region of Asher... Let’s go drill there.” They spent a lot of money, money that could be used for spreading the gospel, money that could be used for feeding the poor, but they spent this money because they knew they would get it back. They drilled in the region of Asher. The problem was that, for all the money they spent drilling, they didn’t actually spend much time paying attention to the historical context of the text. You see, the oil that it refers to was not petroleum; it was olive oil.

Question 2:

What do we know of David’s character after he took the throne in Jerusalem?

Dr. John Oswalt

In the books of Samuel, David’s character is really displayed in a remarkable way. His righteousness as he takes over the throne is one of these elements. Unlike so many kings who would be destroying any remnant of the opposing family, David finds Jonathan’s crippled son and brings him into the palace, gives him a lifelong pension. You also see it in his grief over the death not only of Jonathan but over Saul. When these guys come and report the news of Saul’s death, thinking they’re going to be rewarded, they’re not rewarded at all, so that there’s this real sense in which David is saying, “I have become king, not through my efforts or through my rights. I’ve become king by the gift of God, and I cannot over-assume my own position in that.”

Dr. Richard E. Averbeck

In his rise to power, King David came up as a young man who was anointed and who loved the Lord, showed it by all sorts of ways in which he wrote songs and so on. And one of the things that stood out is he really was a man after God’s own heart. And as he continued to grow in that, that kept being tested by Saul’s resistance to his anointing and all the things that went on with that through his life, and he remained faithful. When it comes into 2 Samuel, when he is established as the king, again, he’s

loyal and faithful to the Lord, but he doesn't stay focused sometimes on what the Lord has given him to do and what it would mean to be genuine before the Lord. This shows up in some of the ways he handled his family in terms of his sons, not handling some of the bad things that happened in a way that was really godly. And also, of course, with the Bathsheba and Uriah incident, things degenerated. Now, he remained faithful to the Lord, he kept going back to the Lord. One of the things, though, we learn from David's life for us is that even a man after God's own heart can commit some of the worst possible sinful acts. And we need to keep that in mind and remember that we need to take heed lest we fall.

Prof. Mumo Kisau

King David was a sinner, and as a sinner, if you will, if you'll remember, he even took somebody's wife, even made somebody to die because of his sin. But King David was a good man because he was easy to confess. The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us." And therefore, King David, when he was told by Nathan what had happened to this man who took somebody else's little lamb, he said, "Who could that be?" and "He should be put to death." And Nathan said, "It is you. You took a man's wife." And because of that, he began to weep and ask for forgiveness. He was just a man after God's own heart, because if you read Psalm 51, there Psalm 51 it is written in a confession mode. He is asking God, "Please forgive me. Don't take your Holy Spirit from me. I am a man, you know, born of sin and among men of sin. Please forgive me." And, therefore, eventually you'll see King David was a warrior, and he was able to defend his people, but at the same time he was obedient and willing to confess. And the Bible says a contrite heart God will not despise, will not leave. And that is what we learn from King David. He was a wonderful king for the children of Israel.

Question 3:

Why did the nation of Israel divide into two nations: Israel and Judah?

Mr. Sherif Atef Fahim, translation

The nation of Israel divided into two nations: the northern kingdom, called Israel, and the southern kingdom, called Judah. This division took place because of two historical events. The main reason was because of Solomon. Solomon had gone astray from worshipping the living God. He married many foreign women who worshiped other gods, and they turned Solomon's heart away. God told him, "I will divide your kingdom for turning away from me. Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son." The second clear reason the division took place was in the days of Rehoboam, historically in the days of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. Rehoboam was a young king when he succeeded his father. Solomon had wearied the people with taxes, so the people complained to Rehoboam. They said, "Your father wearied us with taxes. Make them lighter." The elders of Israel said to Solomon, "They are right. You have to make the taxes lighter." Rehoboam did not, however, listen to the elders' advice, and he went with the advice

of his friends, the young men he'd grown up with. They advised him, "You have to show them that you are tougher than your father." And this was exactly Rehoboam's response. He said to the people, "I am stronger than my father, and I will weary you more than my father did." As a result, the people rebelled against him, and the kingdom was divided into the northern kingdom, which included the ten tribes that left Rehoboam to be governed by Jeroboam, and the southern kingdom, which included two tribes — the tribes of Judah and Benjamin — governed by Rehoboam.

Dr. Todd Berger

After the reign of David, his son Solomon became king, and we see this transition moving from the book of Samuel, the end of the book of Samuel into the beginning of the book of Kings... The story of Solomon did not end well, and as a result of that, the kingdom divided into northern and southern kingdoms. We actually have two versions of the story that happened, but I think they're both true, obviously, but if we're reading in the book of Kings, what we find is that Solomon, in his reign, did some very specific things that the law said not to do as the king... And so, we have this really difficult passage ... where God says, "I'm taking the kingdom away from Solomon, but because of the covenant that I made with David, I'm not going to do it in Solomon's lifetime, but I'm going to do it in the life of his son. And also because of the covenant I made with David, I'm not going to take all of the kingdom, but I'm going to keep one tribe back with David, but my people, I'm giving to someone else." And so, it doesn't happen in Solomon's lifetime, but in the reign of his son Rehoboam then. Then you have the actual events that come about to cause it, where Rehoboam doesn't listen to his elders, and he gathers all of his young friends together, and the story is told about how the northern kingdom rebels. So, when I say there's two stories here, we can go to the events that happened with Rehoboam, and there were very specific events that led to this, a rebellion, if you want to call it, of the northern kingdom, where they left and formed their own nation. But theologically, we have to go back to Solomon because that's where the real cause was underneath this. The human events transpired with Rehoboam and his foolishness, but the theological reason for the division goes back to Solomon, and it goes back to God's declaration that because of Solomon's idolatry he is going to take the kingdom and give it to someone else.

Question 4:

What was the Syrian-Israelite coalition, and why was it formed?

Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

The coalition between the country Syria — that corresponds basically to modern-day Syria — and Israel, which is the northern kingdom, the northern regions of the Land of Promise given to Israel, that coalition around 734 B.C. is of great importance in the history of Israel's prophets, because the unthinkable happened. The people of God, the northern kingdom, the northern tribes of Israel, actually made an alliance with Syria, a pagan, demon-worshiping kingdom, and they joined forces together in order

to resist the great Assyrian empire that was threatening them. But worse than that, not just did they form an alliance to resist Assyria, because even Judah did that. They would form alliances with all kinds of people to try to resist great powers that were coming their ways. But it was worse than that. Syria and Israel, that coalition, actually attacked Judah in the days of Ahaz and tried to force Judah to join them in that coalition to resist Assyria. Now, the result of that was predictable. The Assyrians didn't like it, and as a result the Assyrians came in, just years later, and absolutely decimated Syria and brought Israel to its knees, and made them vassals that owed great tribute to the kingdom of Assyria. And in fact, the southern kingdom itself suffered because not only were they attacked by this coalition, but they submitted themselves for protection to the empire of Assyria. The prophet Isaiah had actually told Ahaz, "Don't do that. You seek help from the Lord, and he will protect you from this great coalition that's attacking you." But Ahaz refused. He said, "No, I need help from something that I can see, and that's the Assyrian Empire." So at that time then, Judah itself became a vassal nation of the empire of Assyria.

Dr. Chip McDaniel

The Syrian-Israelite coalition was an agreement between Syria and Israel, the northern kingdom, to try to fend off the Assyrian Empire that was encroaching on its territory. Sometimes because Israel is also known as Ephraim, you'll see it in the literature as the Syro-Ephramaic alliance. To get a handle on this, we really need to look at the geography of the Holy Land. The Holy Land is called "the land in between," and it's between three continents. You have Asia. And then the Fertile Crescent goes up and goes into Egypt. But then you also have Europe. And so, it served as a major trade route, and all of the big dogs in the neighborhood wanted to control those trade routes because they would generate wealth from that. Earlier on in Israel's history the big guns were the Hittites to the northwest and the Egyptians to the southeast. But by the time we get to Jonah, for example, the major player is Assyria. The Syro-Ephramaic alliance or the Israelite-Syrian alliance was from 735 to 722 B.C. We know these because of the chronological markers that are in the text; we can date these very precisely. So it lasted about 13 years... And the Syrian-Israelite alliance was an attempt to join forces to keep Assyria from gaining hegemony over that region. The way that played out is seen to for us in Isaiah 7 and 8 where the king of Judah is concerned because the king of Israel and the king of Syria have allied themselves together against Assyria, and they want Judah to join them. And Isaiah would come to Ahaz and say, "Don't worry about these kings or these kingdoms, God's going to take care of it." The way that played out chronologically is in 735 Isaiah says to King Ahaz, the king of the south, "Don't worry about these kingdoms because a child is going to be born, and before that child can, with discernment, say 'my father and my mother' the tribute is going to have to be taken from ... Syria and Israel and is going to go to Assyria." And so, it's a way of saying they're going to be humbled. They're going to be, the two kingdoms that are in agreement here, they're going to be humbled, they're going to be impoverished by the king of Assyria. He also says in chapter 7 that before a child is born and reaches the ability to make moral categories, moral decisions on his own, the kings are going to be gone, they're going to be out of there, meaning that there's no more kingdoms to worry about. So, the

message to Ahaz that Isaiah gives is, “You trust God. Don’t worry about these kingdoms. Don’t join them against Assyria. Don’t worry about them because God’s going to take care of them.” And how that played out historically is that in 735 the alliance was made between Israel and Syria. In 732, Assyria came in and took Syria into captivity and received tribute from Israel. And 10 years later, about 13 years after the time of the agreement, the king of Assyria comes in and takes the northern kingdom. And so, it only lasted from 735 to 722... It had a major role in helping us to understand Isaiah 7 and 8 where Isaiah is dealing with King Ahaz and saying, “Don’t worry about this alliance, God’s going to take care of it.”

Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

The Syrian-Israelite coalition was formed between King Pekah, the son of Remaliah, and Rezin, the king of Syria. The purpose of this coalition was to stop the Assyrian march led by Tiglath-Pileser in the eighth century B.C. So, King Pekah, king of Israel, formed this coalition or partnership, with King Rezin, king of Syria, to prevent the Assyrian advance. King Pekah asked Judah to join and help in this coalition during the reign of King Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah. However, King Jotham refused to join the coalition, and as a result of King Jotham’s rejection, Rezin and Pekah marched to Jerusalem to fight Jerusalem. This was during the reign of King Ahaz, the son of Jotham, in 735 B.C. This war is called the Syro-Ephraimite war, because it was the alliance of Syria and Ephraim, or Israel, against Jerusalem, or against the kingdom of Judah. Although God sent a message of assurance to King Ahaz and asked him to trust the Lord and not be afraid of that war and that coalition, King Ahaz, however, doubted and did not trust the Lord. So, he made an alliance with Tiglath-Pileser to resist this war from the coalition of Syria and Israel.

Question 5:

Why did Israel fall to Assyria?

Dr. Russell T. Fuller

Israel fell — and we’re talking about the northern half of Israel — fell to Assyria in the year 722, and the reason why they fell was because of their sin. If you look at 2 Kings 17, it goes right into detail; at the end of the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel, it goes into great detail of why God took them into exile. And again, it starts out right off that they forsook the Lord, they went into idolatry, and they wanted to go in the custom of the nations. They wanted to live just like all the other nations lived. And so, they went off into sin. They went off into idolatry. And then, the special sins that are mentioned are, again, this notion of like, again, an ancient abortion practice where they caused their children to pass through the fire. And this was especially something that God was very displeased with and something that God brought his wrath and judgment upon the northern tribes for this. But yet, the Lord at times, for the northern tribes, offered them very much grace and mercy if they would turn to him. Even at the beginning of their dynasty under Jeroboam I, God said, “If you’ll obey me, I will establish you a house much like I did David” — again,

not eternal and so forth, but God was offering them a great reward there. He made the same offer to Jehu, but again, both of them rejected God's offer and mercy of grace, and so did all of the kings of the north, and so it was their apostasy, it was their sin that ultimately led to their destruction in the year 722.

Dr. Carol Kaminski

Yeah, it's very troubling when you think about what happens to this northern kingdom because in 722 the Assyrians come against the north. And of course, the Assyrians are one of Israel's enemies. You see this in the book of Jonah, in the eighth century prophet, and Jonah, the last thing he wants to do is go to Nineveh, which is the major Assyrian city. We also know from the Assyrians there are some incredible wall reliefs. One good example is the Lachish reliefs, and they depict the Assyrians as, they're taking, they're conquering people. They skin people alive. In the city of Lachish, they beheaded people and had their heads hanging around. They're beheading people, some of them cut off hands, impaling people. So, a hideous kind of situation, and it raises the question, why on earth does God use the Assyrians to bring judgment against his own people? Again, if you look at the history of it with the northern kingdom, they'd been worshiping idols for 200 years. This is contrary to the Ten Commandments, it's contrary to the Mosaic covenant, and one of the things God had promised in Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 27, 28 — these blessings and curses — one of the curses is “You're going to go into exile, and you're going to be defeated by your enemies.” And so, this really is in fulfillment of those promises and the curses of the covenant because of their disobedience. And what it really does is it underscores the human problem and the problem of sin, and Israel's inability to really keep God's commandments. So, God raises up the Assyrians, they come in. 2 Kings 17 describes this and gives a long, long list of why God brought the Assyrians, and it's not a pretty picture. So, clearly placing it on their own actions for several hundred years.

Mr. Sherif Atef Fahim, translation

God allowed the people of Israel to fall into the hands of the pagan Assyrians. By “Israel” here we mean the northern kingdom, the ten tribes of Israel who were exiled by the Assyrians. Indeed, this was a very difficult matter because the wars launched by the Assyrians were extremely harsh and aggressive. They cruelly destroyed the northern kingdom and the ten tribes. The reason for this, in one word, was sin — all sorts of sin. The people of Israel in the northern kingdom lived in sin from the division of the united kingdom until the exile. There was no time when the people had a good king. All the kings of the northern kingdom were evil, even though God had sent them prophets like Hosea and Amos, and there were prophets who ministered among them like Elijah. Elijah tried to call them to reunite with the southern kingdom and return to Davidic rule. They refused and lived in sin and worshiped foreign gods. As a result, their judgment came sooner than the southern kingdom, and they were exiled by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.

Question 6:**What happened during the Sennacherib invasion of Judah when Hezekiah was king?****Dr. Russell T. Fuller**

One of the ... most important historical events to happen in the history of Israel was when Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came to defeat Hezekiah, king of Judah. Under Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, Judah becomes a vassal state to the Assyrians. But when Sargon II dies in around the year 705 B.C., rebellion takes place all over in Assyria, especially in Babylon in the south under a man named Merodach Baladan — he rebels in the south — and he tries to get, successfully, Hezekiah to rebel on the other side of the kingdom. And so, both guys rebel as Sennacherib comes to the throne after his father Sargon II. Well, he needs to reestablish his kingdom, he comes against Judah, and he takes basically all the cities of Judah. There's really one city left, and that's Jerusalem. And what he does is he basically says, "Your God is like every other god. I will take out the Lord God of Israel just like I took out all the other gods." He talks in a very arrogant way against the Lord God of Heaven, and God says, "I will show Sennacherib my power." And so, what he does is he supernaturally delivers Israel, and what he does is he smites the Assyrian army and 185,000 Assyrian troops will die. He will hear a report of, probably, a rebellion going on back in his land, and he'll have to go back to Assyria. And we know, even from Assyrian annals, that they'll talk about caging up Hezekiah like a bird in a cage, but they never say they defeat him. Now remember, in Assyrian literature, it's pure propaganda. They never admit defeat at all, so by just saying they have him caged up like a bird, they are really admitting they did not defeat him. So, even in the Assyrian records they admit this. This is a very important event. It's mentioned three times in Scripture, in Kings and Chronicles, and then finally in the book of Isaiah. So, when you see something mentioned three times in Scripture this is very important. During the time of Jeremiah it's going to be mentioned because the people at that time are saying, "Hey, as long as we have the temple, God will deliver us from that." And, of course, what Jeremiah will say is, "You've got the wrong historical thing. It's not going to be what happened under Hezekiah. It's going to be what happened under Eli." Remember there, the temple, the tabernacle did not save them there, you see? And so, this becomes one of the great deliverances. It's so great in Jewish thought that later rabbis during the Talmudic period will look at Hezekiah and call him Messiah. Now, they don't see him as Messiah, but they see him as a type of messiah in the sense of this great deliverance, supernatural deliverance. So, they'll see him as a messianic type because of this remarkable deliverance by God. And so, again, this is one of the greatest deliverances of God in the Old Testament, perhaps maybe the second greatest one behind, again, the great deliverance against Pharaoh back in the time of Moses.

Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

Hezekiah is known for all kinds of things, but in biblical history, perhaps the most important thing, or the most noted thing that he experienced, was the invasion of the Assyrian, Sennacherib. Sennacherib literally destroyed Judah. People ran for their

lives. You can read about it in Micah 1, the devastation that he brought to the land of Judah. But he went further than that. He actually surrounded and laid siege to Jerusalem, and it looked for a while as if Jerusalem would actually fall to Sennacherib like Samaria in the north had fallen earlier to the Assyrians. It was only because Isaiah persuaded Hezekiah to repent of his sins and to start trusting in God that God sent a plague among the Assyrians, and they all ran home. It was a great miracle event. But that event of the surrounding of Jerusalem, the laying of siege to Jerusalem, the city of God, David's city, the centerpiece of the world, it was of such a crisis that it brought everything to a heightened status in the days of Hezekiah.

Question 7:

What was the prophet Hosea's message to the northern kingdom of Israel?

Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

The message of the prophet Hosea to the northern kingdom of Israel was a message declaring God's lawsuit against Israel. It proclaimed God's judgment and punishment against Israel because of their sin, because they did not repent, and because they rejected the Lord by worshiping foreign gods. Also, part of this message was exhorting the people to return to the Lord, affirming God's love towards his people, as in chapter 11, and encouraging them to repent and return to the Lord, as we can see in chapter 14.

Dr. David Correa, translation

The prophet Hosea's message to the northern kingdom of Israel, was that all these calamities — the suffering they were experiencing from the Assyrian invasion — were well deserved because of their disobedience, their unfaithfulness, and their idolatry, just as it's described in his book.

Rev. Michael J. Glodo

While the book of Hosea has a significant portion of its message directed toward the southern kingdom of Judah, it's also directed substantially to the northern kingdom of Israel, or we might say Ephraim. And the message is, "You have been unfaithful to the covenant." And there are a series of vivid metaphors where we can see this — an unfaithful wife, an illegitimate child, an uncaring mother — there are all these vivid metaphors, and the charges are particularly piled up there in chapter 4. And in spite of their disobedience, God was still going to pursue them, such as Hosea did through his object lesson of marrying Gomer, the prostitute, or the unfaithful wife. But exile was going to happen. That was an inevitability... They had leaned upon a relationship with Syria ... to help protect themselves against the empire of Assyria, and when they did that, they had depended upon human strength rather than on God as their king and defender. And as a cruel irony, the curses of the covenant would lead them into exile in Assyria. So, that exile was inevitable because their covenant-breaking was gross, and it was deep, and it was prolonged, but there is still this message of hope because

Hosea says that God says that “I will take you into the wilderness, and there I will speak kindly to you.” That is, even in bringing his people, bringing about the circumstances of exile, seeing them off into the Assyrian captivity, even still, God had purposes for them, that it was going to be in captivity where they would become receptive to hearing of God’s faithfulness, to turning back to him, and to praying for his salvation and mercy. And so, this is why the book ends so prominently on a note of hope, offering the opportunity for restoration in spite of all that they had done to break God’s covenant.

Question 8: **Why did Judah fall to the Babylonians?**

Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

The kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonians for one simple reason: their sins were too great for God to tolerate them anymore. All the way back in the days of Moses, in like Deuteronomy 4, Deuteronomy 28–30, God made it very clear that if the people of God entered into the Promised Land, and they flagrantly violated his covenant, if they disobeyed his law flagrantly over and over, he’d be patient with them. As Leviticus 26 tells us, he would discipline them for their sins, and if they would not repent, then he’d multiply that seven times, and if they still didn’t repent, again seven times, and again seven times, and again seven times. But at the end of this, just like in Deuteronomy 4, Leviticus 26 says, “In the end, if you still have not repented, then I will send you out of the land. I will exile you.” And that had happened already to the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. But by the time 586 B.C. came, it had happened to Judah as well. And Judah’s problem was, to begin with, that they ignored what happened in the north. They were warned by the prophets, “Look what happened to Samaria. Look what happened to the northern kingdom. It can happen to you too.” I mean, they just didn’t believe it was possible. After all, Jerusalem is the City of David, it’s the favored city of God, it’s the capital of the world, it’s to rise up and be the greatest of all the mountains on the earth. So, they just simply could not believe it. And even after several deportations of Judahite leaders had occurred in the days of Jeremiah, the people were still, according to Jeremiah 7, saying, “Nothing more can happen to us because we have the temple. We have the temple! We have the temple!” And Jeremiah looked at them and said, “What good is the temple going to do to you? What good is it going to give you?” And the answer was, as far as Jeremiah was concerned, and as far as God was concerned, none at all. It would not protect them from his judgment coming against them. And so, as they continued in their idolatry, as they continued to rebel against God in these flagrant ways, God finally determined in the days of Manasseh, according to the book of 2 Kings, he’d had enough, and that they were doomed to suffer a time of judgment in Judah, as well as in the north. And so, Judah was taken away. Jerusalem was destroyed. The population was scattered, and the Babylonians took many of them off into exile for a long time under the judgment of God. It seemed impossible to people at the time that that could happen. I mean, after all, God had delivered Jerusalem in the days of

Hezekiah. He had delivered them from the Assyrians, and they were sure that that meant that God would never allow any foreign nation to dominate them. But, in fact, he did. And they destroyed Jerusalem and Jerusalem lie in ruins for hundreds and hundreds of years until Jesus came and the salvation began. And then, of course as we know, one day Jesus will bring Jerusalem from above down to the earth, and the centerpiece of the world will be restored even greater than it was before, and all nations will flock to him on that day.

Dr. Russell T. Fuller

Yeah, the Babylonians came down on Judah three different times. The first time they came down was in the year 605, and that was in the aftermath of a famous battle that occurred at a place called Carchemish, which was battle between the Babylonians and the Egyptians for who was going to basically succeed the Assyrians as being the dominant military force in the ancient world. The Babylonians won. Now, what happened was that, Josiah, the last righteous king, he went up to try to attack the Egyptian king Neco, but he killed Josiah. And so, what the Egyptians did is they installed one of their puppet kings, which would be the son of Josiah — that was Jehoahaz — but he only lasted for a very short period of time, and the Egyptian king replaced him with Jehoiakim. But it was in the third year of Jehoiakim, and this would be in the year 605, that he decided to rebel against Babylon because Babylon now was the world power instead of Egypt. He decided to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar, and that was a fatal mistake. Nebuchadnezzar comes down; he takes away certain exiles, some of the cream of the crop, to serve him back in Babylon. And one of those individuals was the prophet Daniel. He would go into captivity in the year 605. At the end of Jehoiakim's reign, around the year 597, there is yet another revolt against Nebuchadnezzar — again another mistake — this time by the son of Jehoiakim. His name is Jehoiachin. Again, here comes Nebuchadnezzar, he takes away, again, the cream of the crop, again takes away all craftsmen, you know, anybody who would be of benefit to the Babylonians, he basically took them away. This time the prophet Ezekiel goes into exile in the year 597. Then he installs Zedekiah, and Zedekiah will be the last king of Judah. And at the end of his reign he makes the fatal mistake, again, of rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar — that was never a good move — and so Nebuchadnezzar comes this time, he's had enough. This time he is going to thoroughly destroy Judah. He's going to kill Zedekiah... I mean, take him into exile, kill his sons in front of him and then take him into exile. And so it's, 586 was the real big one with the complete destruction of the temple and so forth. And again, what will be said in the book of Kings, it goes even back to the apostasy of Manasseh and his sin of offering up children in sacrifice. And what God says there is something you rarely see in Scripture: "I will not forgive Judah for the sins of Manasseh" is what is stated there. And so, it's because of sin that they keep rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah keeps telling them to submit to the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, but they rebel against God and so forth, and so God brings down his judgment three different times: in the year 605, 597 and then finally 586.

Dr. David Correa, translation

When the Babylonians attacked Judah, they were the instrument that God finally used to fulfill the warnings that, a long time before, he had given to his people. The Babylonians came and made a series of deportations. And finally, they came and besieged the city and destroyed it completely, just as God had warned. By destroying the city, of course, they destroyed not just the walls, but they destroyed the temple, destroyed the palace, and carried the people of Judah away into captivity, thus completing the warning that God had given to his people in Leviticus, when he said, “If you don’t repent,” again and again, “if you don’t repent, he will increase your punishment until it is the worst of all trials — the judgment of exile.”

Question 9:**What was Joel’s main message?****Dr. Seth Tarrer**

Joel’s message to Judah contains a tension. There’s a tension between the present that Israel and Judah have just experienced — and we see this in chapters 1 and 2 with the plague of locusts — and we see there’s another element of the tension. There’s something future oriented in Joel as well, something pushing out beyond the immediacy of Israel and Judah’s context there in the pre-exilic and exilic period. Rather, it’s pushing to something that’s something akin to universal judgment, as we see towards the end of the book of Joel, in chapter 3. And so, the issue then turns on this idea of “day of the Lord.” So, in Joel, “day of the Lord” is seen locally and immediately in the plague of locusts, as understood to be judgment. However, even intermingled in chapters 1 and 2, there are texts and there are signs in which Joel is speaking not only of Israel’s and their immediate return, but also of a coming universal judgment. And this is interesting because Joel gets taken up, as you know, in the Book of the Twelve, with the Minor Prophets, and Joel is going to use, extensively, he’s going to use the remainder of the prophetic tradition, he’s going to use Obadiah, Isaiah, Amos. And so, by Joel’s use of these older prophetic traditions, these authoritative prophetic traditions, Joel’s message is understood immediately locally for Israel and Judah, yet it’s also meant to be understood and taken up and read in an eschatological register or key that speaks not only to God’s restoration of physical Israel post exile, but also of his coming judgment and eschatological reign.

Dr. Russell T. Fuller

Yeah, Joel’s main message to Judah was one of repentance. God was going to bring a plague that was going to be so great that for generations people were going to talk about this. Now when we hear about this coming plague, to us it doesn’t seem like such a great thing. It’s a locust plague, and to us that just sounds like some grasshoppers on steroids or something that are just out of control. But to them this would have been a terrible plague. Usually locust plagues will come in the springtime, and then sometimes in the fall, when the two harvests are. And so, if you have a locust plague, let’s say, in the springtime, your barley harvest, your wheat

harvest can be completely wiped out. And the difficulty with this, of course, is starvation is going to set in. So, what's being described there is a very serious plague that's going to come, and the main message that Joel has for them is "rend your hearts and not your garments." You know, when disaster would come to them, they would tear their clothes. They would throw dirt upon their head. They would do things that, again, would seem rather odd to us today. But the Lord was like, "No, this time you better tear your hearts." This was the great message of Joel in repentance. And he says, "And maybe the Lord will leave us a remnant behind us so that we can have an offering to the Lord our God. Hopefully God will turn away his wrath. If we'll repent and truly tear our hearts and not just our clothes, if we'll have true repentance maybe God will lessen or maybe he'll even completely wipe it out." And then, he talks about how, "But don't worry," this destruction is not going to be complete and entire. There is going to be a full restoration. And then he goes from restoring them at that time to the restoration of Messiah when what is described there is that he will pour out his Spirit upon all flesh, and even the lowest of the people in society, even the slaves, the Holy Spirit will be poured out even upon them. And then, you see this universal promise, not just to Israel, but to the whole world: "Whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." And so, the main message of Joel is one of repentance, but of divine mercy and blessing on a universal scale.

Question 10:

What was Ezekiel's main message to Judah?

Dr. Donna Petter

Ezekiel is a great prophetic book, and he has a really profound message, and it's really specific. It's not just to Judah, but it's to the exiles who are in Babylon. So, Ezekiel finds himself in the middle of a mess. God's people have been deported from Jerusalem to Babylon in the exile of 597 B.C. So, it's a set of circumstances that are really tragic because God's people failed miserably. And Ezekiel is one among the exiles who were deported with Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C. And as a result of that exile, God calls Ezekiel in the middle of this mess to speak a word to the exiles, and it's a very specific word... A few years into the exile, God calls Ezekiel to give a message to the exiles, and it's particularly pertaining to the events in Jerusalem, that the city is going to fall, and there is going to be another deportation. And now Ezekiel has to tell that to his audience in Babylon. His audience in Babylon didn't think that the city was going to suffer defeat, and instead, they had a mindset that nothing can touch Jerusalem. So, instead of it being a time to heed the false prophets that said the city was going to be spared, instead of it being a time to be hopeful, Ezekiel is raised up to say, no, in fact death and destruction are coming close to Jerusalem. But this didn't fit the theological grid of the exiles, and the reason it didn't fit the theological grid of the exiles is because they were holding on, and rightfully so, to the promises of God that said Jerusalem was the apple of God's eye, etc. So, they were holding onto these promises, but in fact, they forgot and they didn't realize that the reason why the nation was in the state that it was in had everything to do with their fault. So,

God raises up Ezekiel to give them a correction and to really bring them to the place of understanding, that this is not a time to hope for restoration, but indeed, it really is a time to mourn... And so, in the event that they had mourned and acted like Ezekiel, that wouldn't have changed the circumstances. Jerusalem was still going to be destroyed because of the scroll. God said that he was decreeing mourning, lamentation and woe. But what would have happened had they mourned over sin and over the consequences of their sin, it would have just been a recognition of wrongdoing, and that is something that God was after. He was after a change of heart and a recognition of wrongdoing. And so, Ezekiel's aim then was to get these hardened people, hard-hearted people to mourn over their circumstances even before the Fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C... Even though Ezekiel paints a picture of the reality that it is a time to mourn, that's only part of the story; there is the ending of the book. Because out of mourning, out of death and destruction comes life, and it's because God brings a heart change to the nation and to individuals in the nation. And so, really, out of death then comes life. So, Ezekiel's message is twofold: it is a time to mourn, but it is also a time to rejoice. It's a time to mourn sin and its consequences, it's a time to acknowledge wrongdoing, but then, in God's time, he will bring restoration. And the biggest restoration that they needed was a heart change and a heart transplant. And God says in the final chapters of Ezekiel, that's exactly how he is going to ultimately bring restoration to the nation. So, out of death and destruction Ezekiel promises life, and so the message of Ezekiel is quite profound.

Dr. Seth Tarrer

When we listen to Ezekiel, immediately we're struck by some peculiarities. One, Ezekiel is hard to locate at times. We know he's in exile, he's in Babylon under the sixth-century exile that Judah has experienced, and he's by the river. But other than that, throughout the text, we don't often know exactly to whom he's speaking... This plays a very important role as we read the book of Ezekiel and seek to hear the message. Ezekiel's message is radically theocentric, and it can be seen even in the way in which the book of Ezekiel bounces back and forth between Jerusalem and Babylon, the people of Israel, the elders of Israel, all of Israel, or just whoever is listening to the prophet. So, in some sense, the theocentrically-oriented message of Ezekiel has hearers in all places, in all times. It transcends temporal-spatial boundaries, and Ezekiel then becomes a message that is readily heard and reheard, appropriated, reactualized in subsequent readers and generations of those who would call Ezekiel Holy Scripture. When we look at the text itself, we see 72 times in the book of Ezekiel, the prophet, or the Lord through the prophet, says these things have been done — both judgment and future promise — so that they will know, “I the Lord have spoken in my zeal.” God is concerned, through his actions in history and through the words of his prophet, to concretely demonstrate he is, in fact, the Lord of nations, both in his judgment and in his coming restoration of Israel.

Another theme in the book of Ezekiel that's pretty clearly evident is the idea of God's presence. It leaves early in the book. It leaves the temple, and in that way God is in some ways imaged as not being present with Israel. But that's not the final word. Ezekiel tells us time and again there is a day coming; God, in his mercy, will seek not

only to restore Israel, but God's going to recreate our hearts. There's actually an eschatological push in the book of Ezekiel as we move through, and we read about the way in which God restores all of creation. And the image is powerful. It's of living water. And we see this in Joel, also in Zechariah, that this living water flows from the very throne. Dry bones are made alive again. Things that die are brought back to life... And this is taken up finally in the book of Revelation 22:1-2 where we see the water of life giving life to God's newly re-created world.

Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

The ministry of the prophet Ezekiel was during the reign of Jehoiachin, king of Judah, between 593 and 573 B.C. The book of Ezekiel is organized chronologically. There is a kind of historical sequence of the events. We see in the first section, from chapter 1–24, Ezekiel prophesying about the Fall of Jerusalem and Judah because of sin, rebellion, and disobedience to the Lord. In the second section, from chapter 25–32, Ezekiel deals with the coming judgment over the nations that participated in the Fall of Jerusalem or that rejoiced over the destruction of Jerusalem. The last section, from 33–48, talks about the hope of restoration, the restoration of the exiled to the Land, and the blessings the Lord promises to give his people — the people of Judah and Jerusalem — after the restoration.

Question 11:

How did the post-exilic prophets address the restoration period in Israel?

Dr. Seth Tarrer

When we listen to the prophets we consider post-exilic, good examples come to us from Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. These are prophets whose oracles are being collected and included in the canonical Scriptures of Israel, after they've been released from exile, towards the end of the sixth century, and they're returning home to what's now a Persian province known as Yehud, okay? So, some of the general themes throughout all of these books, is the sense of a return of the Lord to Zion, or Jerusalem. There's also a theme that crops up again and again, and that is God's victory over the oppressors of his elect people. There's a constant need and desire for a rebuilding of the temple... Along with the rebuilding of the temple as a major theme in these post-exilic prophets, we also see an emerging sense of the desire that Israel intercede or see itself as functioning on behalf of the other nations, that God in some way desires, through Israel, to bless the nations, which, if you think about it makes sense, because in the initial covenant call, God has set up the covenant with Israel as the means by which all the nations of the earth would be blessed. So, it's in Israel's best interest to, in some sense, seek the welfare of the nations because, by doing so, they can avoid themselves being extinguished...

We look at the book of Haggai, and we see the people complaining that it's not quite time to build the house yet — "house" being the temple of the Lord. However, under

the prophet Haggai's urging, he reminds the people that, why should they have nice homes to live in when the Lord himself still does not have a house? And so, under Haggai, we see the call for the temple to be rebuilt. And this call is issued personally to the Persian provincial governor Zerubbabel... Many of these similar themes can also be seen in Zechariah, a parallel prophet, a prophet that's contemporary with Haggai. However, in the book of Zechariah, we also see some distinctive features, particularly the notion of the Lord raising up this anointed one known as "the branch," a title that Zerubbabel never took, but Zechariah does apply to the high priest Joshua in this time of rebuilding. The branch evokes messianic language we've heard from Isaiah before. And so what then, as Haggai and Zechariah are incorporated into the canon, the twelve minor prophets, there's now this forward-looking element of which this branch will restore in typical Davidic idyllic fashion, restore Israel to its proper place before God, among the nations, on behalf of the world...

And in Malachi we see, even in the name itself, there's a sense in which God has something to tell his people still. Malachi means "my messenger," so who knows if it's even someone's name or simply the title of the book because God has a message, and that is, he is preparing the way, and he's going to send someone to prepare the way for him. Interestingly, in the Hebrew Bible, the Prophets are not the end of the canon. The Writings end the canon. However, we as Christians have replaced the Writings with the Prophets, and Malachi butts up neatly and nicely with the book of Matthew. Why? Because Malachi said he's going to send a messenger. The Lord is preparing the way for his return to Zion and Israel's rightful place. That prophet, the messenger that is to come is spoken of as Elijah. Who is Elijah? He was a mysterious ninth century prophet who never died. So, in some sense, there's this continual use of the prophetic tradition to not only recall Israel's past, where they've been; their present, where they are — which is the need to rebuild and restore purity — but there's this forward-looking motion, even by the placement of Malachi at the very end of the Old Testament, pushing us to look for the one who is to come.

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