

He Gave Us Prophets

Lesson 6

Literary Analysis
of the Prophets

Lesson Guide



thirdmill

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HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

This lesson guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video. If you do not have access to the video, the lesson guide will also work with the audio and/or manuscript versions of the lesson. Additionally, the video and lesson guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson guide has been divided into segments that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the lesson guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each segment and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
 - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
 - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
 - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Notes

I. Introduction (0:26)

II. Historical Narratives (1:41)

Historical narratives dominate the terrain of several Old Testament prophetic books.

A. Types of Narratives (3:10)

1. Biography (3:23)

Daniel 1–6 reports a number of events in Daniel’s life from a third-person biographical point of view.

2. Autobiography (4:29)

Daniel 7–12 takes a turn toward autobiography.

Old Testament writers wrote in narrative form so that they could teach their lessons indirectly to us.

B. Content of Narratives (5:27)

1. Prophetic Call (5:50)

A prophetic call is a report of the times when God commissioned prophets to speak on his behalf.

2. Symbolic Actions (6:59)

Many times God called his spokesmen to perform certain actions that took on symbolic value.

3. Vision Reports (8:09)

Vision reports are when a prophet describes a visual encounter with God.

4. Historical Background (10:23)

Designed to provide a context for prophetic messages and actions to help us understand them correctly.

III. Communication with God (12:52)

The prophets of the Old Testament prayed to God in ways that resemble the Psalms. The full range of every imaginable kind of prayer can be found within the prophetic books.

A. Prayers of Lament (13:45)

Laments offer disappointment and sadness and confusion to the Lord.

The frequency of prayers of lament indicates that this was a very central part of the prophetic ministry.

1. Sins of People (15:11)

Habakkuk talked to God about two big problems:

- the way Israel had rebelled against God
- the horrors of God's judgment in the aggression of the Babylonians

When the prophets saw the pain and suffering of God's people, they cried out to God and called others to cry out too.

2. Judgment (16:55)

Usually, prophets offered laments to let the people know how severe their sins were and to call them to repentance.

B. Prayers of Praise (19:16)

When the prophets would see what good things God was going to do, they would come to him with praise.

When the prophets honor the Lord with praise, they praise him for his judgments and for his blessings.

1. Judgment (20:37)

The prophets honored God with praise for his ability to strike the nations and to destroy them in judgment.

When God judges those who persecute his people, the people of God should praise Him.

2. Blessings (21:28)

The prophets often praised the Lord not only for his judgment but also for the many blessings that he gives to his people.

IV. Communication with People (23:53)

God called his prophets to be his emissaries. The vast majority of their word is actually messages from God to the people.

A. Speeches of Judgment (24:43)

Old Testament prophets usually delivered their speeches to people in typical forms or patterns.

1. Judgment Oracles (25:17)

A typical oracle of judgment has two major components:

- Accusation — the prophet calls attention to the sins of God's people.
- Sentencing — the prophet announces what kind of covenant curse the people will experience because of their sins.

2. Woe Oracles (27:22)

Very similar to judgment oracles, but introduced by an expression of "woe."

3. **Lawsuits (29:14)**

“*rib*” (pronounced REEVE) — a legal proceeding or a lawsuit that took place in the heavenly court of Yahweh, the Great King.

The prophets often had visions of heaven, and many times the throne room of God was seen as a courtroom.

Lawsuits appear in the prophets as one of the ways God accuses his people and threatens them with judgment.

B. Speeches of Blessing (32:04)

1. **Judgment of Enemies (32:25)**

Oracles of judgment, woe and lawsuits against Gentile nations:

- declared that God was going to destroy the enemies of Israel
- assured Israel that God would deliver his people

2. **Oracles of Blessing (33:22)**

Announcements of blessing were very flexible in form. A basic pattern appears many times:

- introductory address
- reason for the blessing
- elaboration on what that blessing will be

C. **Mixed Speeches (35:22)**

Mixed speeches come in many different forms. They had the potential both for referring to the blessings of God and the curses of God.

1. **Judgment-Salvation Oracles (35:40)**

Judgment-salvation oracles where judgment is threatened against some and blessings are offered to others within the same speech.

2. Call to Repentance (35:58)

The prophets warned of judgment and offered blessings to those who repented.

3. Call to War (36:18)

Prophets called their listeners to victory or to defeat in war.

4. Prophetic Disputation (36:31)

Prophets entered into disputations or arguments with other prophets.

5. Parable (36:59)

Parables may be the positive announcement of God's grace or the negative announcement of his judgment.

V. Conclusion (37:45)

3. How are historical narratives used within Old Testament prophetic writings?

4. What do prayers of lament look like, and how did the prophets use them?

5. What do prayers of praise look like, and how did the prophets use them?

6. What do speeches of judgment look like, and how did the prophets use them?

7. What do speeches of blessing look like, and how did the prophets use them?

8. What are mixed speeches, and how did the prophets use them?

9. In general, why did prophets prophesy?

Application Questions

1. Why is it important to pay attention to historical narratives in prophetic books? When we read prophetic writings, what relationship should there be between our understanding of things written in historical narratives and the other things we are reading?
2. What do standard prophetic forms imply about the way we should read prophecy?
3. When was the last time you spent time lamenting to God? Why type of lament did you offer? How often do you interpret suffering in your life as a result of divine judgment? Are there other reasons that Christians suffer? What can we learn from the ways the prophets lamented that might incline God to respond to us positively?
4. The theme of praise for judgment appears many places in the prophetic writings. Is it appropriate for Christians to praise God his judgments? Why or why not?
5. Why did the prophets speak so frequently about both the blessings and the curses of God? Should modern churches do the same thing? Why or why not?
6. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study? Why?

Glossary

Ahaz – Son of Jotham and King of Judah from 741-726 B.C.; known for his wickedness and refusal to trust God

Amos – Prophet who ministered from around 760-750 B.C. when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam was king of Israel

Assyria – Empire located in northern Mesopotamia in the ancient Near East that invaded and conquered the northern kingdom of Israel around 722 B.C.

Babylonia – Empire located in southern Mesopotamia in the ancient Near East that invaded and conquered Judah and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 586 B.C.; capital city was Babylon

Daniel – Prophet taken to Babylon as a young man in the first deportation of 605 B.C.; ministered from at least 605-539 B.C.; known for his ability to interpret dreams and for his devotion to God, even when thrown into a lion's den

Habakkuk – Prophet who most likely ministered sometime around the first Babylonian invasion in 605 B.C.

historical narratives – Stories that record events that took place in the past

Isaiah – Prophet from Judah who ministered from approximately 740-701 B.C. during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah

Jeremiah – Old Testament prophet from about 626-586 B.C., also called the "weeping prophet"; prophesied about the future of Judah and of the new covenant to come

Judah – One of the twelve tribes of Israel; Jacob's fourth son from whose offspring the promised Messiah was to come; name of the southern kingdom after the nation of Israel was divided

judgment oracles – A type of prophetic speech consisting of an accusation that details the offence and a sentencing that announces the consequences

judgment-salvation oracles – A type of prophetic speech where judgment is threatened against some and blessings are offered to others within the same speech

laments – Prayers of disappointment, sadness and confusion offered to the Lord

lawsuit – A type of prophetic speech that addressed God's people in legal terms as if they were standing in judgment in God's heavenly courtroom

Nebuchadnezzar – Powerful king of Babylon from approximately 605-562 B.C.; known for destroying Jerusalem and the temple and carrying the Jews into exile during the Babylonian judgment

oracles of blessing – A type of prophetic speech that most often begins with an introductory address followed by a reason for the blessing and then elaborates on what the blessing will be

parable – A short allegorical story used to teach a moral or spiritual lesson

prophet – God’s emissary who proclaims and applies God’s word, especially to warn of judgment against sin and to encourage loyal service to God that leads to blessings

prophetic call – A narrative reporting a time when God commissioned a prophet to speak on his behalf

prophetic disputation – A type of prophetic speech announcing either blessings or judgment to come in which a prophet disputed or argued against a false view

rib – Hebrew word (transliteration) meaning “to contend” or “to strive”; technical term for a legal proceeding or lawsuit

vision report – A narrative of a prophet’s personal visual encounter with God

woe oracles – A type of prophetic speech that begins with an expression of woe followed by an accusation that details the offense and a sentencing that announces the consequences