**What You Should Know from OT4- Old Testament Prophets**

Lakeside Institute of Theology

1. Why should Christians study the Old Testament?
   1. It is the “Scriptures” referred to by Jesus and the Apostles.
   2. The Old Testament is part of God’s Inspired revelation to us.
   3. The Old Testament is foundational to our understanding.
   4. The Old Testament is practical.
   5. The Old Testament points to Jesus Christ.
2. How many sections are in the traditional Christian structure of the Old Testament, and how many books are in each?
   1. The Law, or Pentateuch – 5 Books: Genesis to Deuteronomy.
   2. The History Books – 12 Books: Joshua to Esther.
   3. The Wisdom Books – 5 Books: Job to Song of Songs.
   4. The Prophesy Books – 17 Books: Isaiah thru Malachi.
3. In terms of content, what is the difference between the 39 books of the English Old Testament, and the 24 Book of the Hebrew Bible?
   1. None – it is the same content, just broken up differently and in a different order.
4. What is the only real difference between the books of the “Major Prophets” and the “Minor Prophets?”
   1. The books of the Major Prophets are longer.
5. Why is it difficult to talk about the Old Testament as “history?”
   1. While much of the Old Testament tells us about events that occurred in the distant past, and these records are very valuable, we must remember that the ancient Hebrews had a different way of looking at how history was written. Our modern idea of history – a sequential, systematic and usually objective record of events – was invented by Greek historian Herodotus in the 5th Century BC – which means almost all the Old Testament was written *before* the invention of what we think of as “history.”
6. What is the proper definition of a “prophet?”
   1. One who speaks for God and interprets His will to the people. So “to prophesy” means to communicate God’s will and His words to people, whether that relates to events happening in the past, the present, or the future.
7. Which books makes up the “Major Prophets,” according to the Christian Bible?
   1. Isaiah
   2. Jeremiah
   3. Lamentations
   4. Ezekiel
   5. Daniel
8. Who were considered the “Minor Prophets?”
   1. The Book of the Twelve, the twelve prophets who wrote much shorter books – Hosea through Malachi.

1. Besides “Major and Minor” or “Former and Latter,” what other useful way may we divide up the Old Testament prophets?
   1. The “Oral Prophets” are those who came earlier and left no writing – including some very important prophets like Nathan, Jehu, Elijah, and Elisha.
   2. The “Writing (or Literary) Prophets” who contributed books to the Bible.
2. Most of the Literary Prophets prophesied to the Southern Kingdom of Judah; which two were sent to the Northern Kingdom of Israel?
   1. Hosea
   2. Amos
3. What major empires were dominant at various times during the period of the Old Testament prophets?
   1. Neo-Assyrian, 934-609 BC
   2. Neo-Babylonian, 626-539 BC
   3. Persian, 538-333 BC
4. Why was the Babylonian Exile so traumatic to the Jews?
   1. They were left wondering if God still loved them and if they were still His special people.
   2. They were unsure how to be the people of God when the things that had most represented their election as God’s people – the Promised Land and the Temple – had been taken away or destroyed.
   3. They did not know how to worship without a Temple.
   4. They were fearful of being assimilated and losing their uniqueness as a people – as had happened to the tribes in the Northern Kingdom of Israel when Assyrian had conquered them 136 years earlier.
5. What three basic points summarize the message of the Old Testament prophets?
6. “You (Israel/Judah) have broken the covenant; you had better repent!”
7. “No repentance? Then judgment! Judgment will also come on all nations.”
8. “Yet there is hope beyond the judgment, of a glorious future restoration for both Israel/Judah and for the nations.”
9. What were the three specific failings of the Hebrew people that were the focus of the prophetic messages?
   1. Idolatry – worshipping other gods.
   2. social injustice – not caring for the poor, widows, orphans and foreigners.
   3. reliance on religious ritualism, instead of true worship.
10. Who was the last Old Testament prophet, and when did he prophesy?
    1. Malachi, around 430 BC.
11. What is the meaning of the name “Isaiah?”
    1. “Yahweh is Salvation”
12. What is the theme and purpose of the Book of Isaiah?
    1. The theme is “Yahweh is salvation” (“Isaiah”) with the word “salvation” appearing 26 times. This has led to Isaiah being called “the evangelical prophet” because of the emphasis on salvation and the redemptive work of the coming Messiah.
13. What is the theme and purpose of the Book of Jeremiah?
    1. The theme is judgment against the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The book identifies the sins, idolatry and covenant breaking by the people of Judah, and coming judgment at the hands of the Babylonian Empire.
14. Why is Jeremiah Chapters 30-33 called the “Book of Comfort?”
    1. Because in the midst of coming judgment, God speaks through Jeremiah to promise that a time of restoration is coming, when God’s people will be returned to the Promised Land.
15. What is the point – in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos and elsewhere – for the oracles of judgment against the non-Jewish nations?
    1. To demonstrate that God is the God over ALL peoples and nations, and not just the people of Israel and Judah.
    2. To make the point that God’s justice will be fulfilled against all those who oppress and do evil, wherever they are.
16. The Book of Lamentations is not actually a prophetic book, so why is it customarily listed among the Major Prophets in the Christian Bible?
    1. Because it is believed to be written by the prophet Jeremiah, and relates to the same theme as the Book of Jeremiah – judgment against the nation of Judah and the city of Jerusalem.
17. What is the main theme of the Book of Lamentations?
    1. Sorrow over the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Babylonians in 586 BC.
18. What is unusual about the structure of Lamentations?
    1. There are five poems (one per each chapter) with the first four of these written as acrostics – the first, second and fourth chapters have 22 verse (the same as the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet), with each verse starting with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet taken in order. The third chapter has 66 verses, or three times the number of Hebrew letters, with each three successive verses beginning with the same letter.
19. What are the lessons learned from Lamentations?
    1. God is sovereign over the affairs of men, even when he uses empires and armies to enact His will.
    2. Sin can bring tragic consequences.
    3. There is hope even in the worst darkness.
20. The prophets are full of symbolic images and actions. In Ezekiel, Hosea and elsewhere, Israel is portrayed as an “adulterous wife.” What is the meaning of this symbolism?
    1. As an adulterous wife is unfaithful to her husband by chasing after other men, so Israel has been unfaithful to God by worshipping other gods.

1. How did Daniel and his friends come to be living in the city of Babylon?
   1. After King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon defeated the Egyptian and Assyrian armies at Carchemish, he pursued the Egyptians back down towards Egypt to ensure they were defeated – which took him right through the Kingdom of Judah. He proceeded to conquer this small kingdom before returning home to Babylon.
2. How many times were groups of Hebrew people deported by the Babylonians, and what was noteworthy about each?
   1. There were THREE deportations:
      1. 605 BC – 1st Deportation, when Nebuchadnezzar first conquers Judah and takes captives back to Babylon – including young nobleman Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (who became Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego), to make them officials in his court.
      2. 597 BC – 2nd Deportation, which included the Prophet Ezekiel.
      3. 586 BC – 3rd deportation, when the Temple and City of Jerusalem are3 destroyed.
3. What was the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a great statue that Daniel interpreted?
   1. The statue represented the Babylonian Kingdom and other kingdoms which were to come – Persians, Greeks, and *either* the Seleucids under Antiochus *or* the Romans.
4. Who defeated the Babylonian Empire?
   1. The Persian Empire, under King Cyrus the Great.
5. What did King Cyrus the Great of Persia do for the Jews almost immediately?
   1. He gave permission for the Jews to return to Jerusalem.
6. What are some of the unusual features of the Book of Daniel?
   1. It is written partly in Hebrew and partly in Aramaic (or Chaldean) – the Babylonian language.
   2. It is an Apocalyptic Book, but it also has parts that seem like history, and other parts that seem prophetic.
   3. It makes specific prediction about coming events, including the coming of future world empires.
   4. It is written in the form of a “chiasm” – meaning it has a literary structure in which themes are stated and then later echoed (“out-and-back”).
7. What is the meaning of “apocalypse” or “apocalyptic?”
   1. “Apocalypse” is from the Greek word meaning “revelation” and so means the revealing of something – especially something that was hidden, or that could not have been known without the revelation.
8. Six of the twelve Minor Prophets have “historical superscriptions.” What does this mean?
   1. It means that written into the copy of the letter are historical references – especially lists of kings – which tell us when the letter was written or when the prophet was active.
9. Why are the books of the Minor Prophets arranged as they are in our Bible?
   1. They are in roughly chronological order:
      1. First are the prophets of the early Assyrian period – Hosea, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah.
      2. Second are the prophets of late Assyrian/Babylonian period – Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah.
      3. Last are the prophets of the Persian or past-exilic period – Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.
10. What is uniquely problematic about the Book of Joel?
    1. There is no historical superscription and the date is widely disputed. While the theme of Joel is a predicted foreign invasion as God’s judgment, it is unclear *which* invasion is being identified – the Assyrian invasion of Israel in the 700s BC; or the Babylonian invasion of Judah in the late 600s/early 500s BC?
11. What is the dominant symbolism of Joel, and what does it signify?
    1. Total destruction by a devastating locust swarm, as a symbol of the coming invasion by foreign armies.
12. In Joel chapter 2, God speaks through the prophet to say “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.” Why is this an especially important passage to Christians?
    1. This is the passage quoted by Peter in Acts 2, at the birth of the Christian church, to explain how the Spirit has come upon the followers of Jesus.
13. Why is the theme of “return” so common and so important in the prophets?
    1. The Jewish perception of “salvation” is a return from exile, back to the Promised Land which God gave to their ancestors – the time of God’s promised restoration.
14. What was the Syro-Ephraimite War, and why is it important?
    1. In the 8th Century BC, Syria (Aram) and the Northern Kingdom of Israel decided to join forces in rebellion against Assyria, and invited the Southern Kingdom of Judah to join them. When Judah refused, Syria and Israel attacked Judah – prompting Judah to call on Assyria for help, leading to the destruction of Israel by Assyrian forces in 722 BC.
15. Who are the “non-standard” prophets, and what is meant by that term?
    1. Daniel, Obadiah, Jonah and Nahum – because they did not prophesy to Israel and/or Judah, but to other peoples or nations. Daniel spoke of future empires; Obadiah spoke against Edom; and the focus of Jonah and Nahum was the people of Nineveh and Assyria.
16. Why does Obadiah preach against the nation of Edom?
    1. Because even though the Edomites were related to the Israelites (the people of Edom were descended from Esau, brother to Jacob/Israel), they had participated in looting Jerusalem after it was conquered by the Babylonians.
17. What – besides the big fish – is unusual about Jonah, compared to the other prophets?
    1. The literary style is unlike the other prophetic books, with Jonah reading more like a historical narrative with two characters – Jonah and God.
18. In what way is Jonah perhaps intended as a foil (“to emphasize by contract”) to the message of the other prophetic books?
    1. The “foreign” people of Nineveh repented and turned to Yahweh upon hearing Jonah’s *first* sermon, while the Jewish people of Israel and Judah refused to listen to generations of testimony from others of God’s prophets.
19. In what way does the Book of Nahum counterbalance the Book of Jonah?
    1. Whereas Jonah is about the conversion of the Assyrians of Nineveh to God, within a little over 100 years the Assyrians had turned completely away from God. Therefore the Book of Nahum pronounces judgment and coming destruction against the Assyrians.
20. What is the meaning of the “Day of the Lord” in the prophetic writings?
    1. The day of destruction, when God’s righteous and wrathful judgment comes against those who have broken His covenant and committed evil.
21. What is the unique structure of the Book of Habakkuk?
    1. Habakkuk offers two “complaints” against God – first, why does God not act against the unrighteousness of Judah, and then how God could use the Babylonians as his tools – each of which is followed by a response from God. The book then ends with a prayer/song of praise from Habakkuk to God.
22. Why are Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi called “post-exilic” prophets?
    1. Because they wrote at the end of the period of the Babylonian exile, when Persia had defeated Babylon and the Jews were given permission to return to the Promised Land.
23. What is the theme of the post-exilic prophets?
    1. Restoration – fulfillment of the promised return of the Jews to the Promised Land as promised by God, though the complete restoration has yet to occur.