

# The prophetic books

**Delta**course

*A discipleship training to equip Christians for works of service, so that the Body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:11-16)*

# 13

## QUIET TIME

**Theme: The prophetic books in the Bible**

- Try to make a specific time every day to meet Jesus Christ through reading and meditating his Word.
- Pray, talk with Jesus Christ and make a few short notes about this Bible passage in your notebook.
- Record what you discover, what speaks to your mind and heart, what you find difficult or what you understood.

- Day 1 1 Peter 1:8-13  
Christ is the Author of all prophecies in the Old Testament
- Day 2 Isaiah 1:10-20  
The prophets proclaimed truths concerning God's will
- Day 3 Isaiah 40:11-31  
The prophets proclaimed truths concerning who God is
- Day 4<sup>BS</sup> Isaiah 52:13-53:12.  
The prophets proclaimed the coming of the Messiah.
- Day 5 Isaiah 55:1-13  
The prophets proclaimed that the Messiah would call the nations. <sup>1</sup>
- Day 6 Jeremiah 23:1-6  
The prophets preached against the false shepherds (leaders)
- Day 7 Jeremiah 23:16-32  
The prophets preached against the false prophets
- Day 8 Ezekiel 18:1-32  
The prophets called people to repentance
- Day 9 Ezekiel 33:1-11  
The prophets warned the people as God's watchmen
- Day 10 Ezekiel 36:22-28  
The prophets prophesied what would happen in the New Testament
- Think about 2 Kings 6:15-17.  
God can open your spiritual eyes.
  - This week ask God to open your spiritual eyes to see Who is with you.
  - Pray every day for someone or something specific and wait in expectation for what God is going to do (Psalm 5:3).

## STUDY

**Theme: The prophetic books**

Read study 13 carefully before the next meeting. If you have questions, write them down and mail them to one of your group leaders. We will seek an answer together.

## BIBLE STUDY

**Theme: A Prophecy about the Servant of the Lord**

If you like, you may already prepare the Bible Study for the coming meeting by reading through the Bible passage. Make use of the 5-step Bible Study method. The Bible passage is: **Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12**

## MEMORISATION

### 1. Motivation

Jesus memorized Bible verses (Luke 4:4-13). Are you doing that?

### 2. Memorisation

Memorise this verse in the Bible version of your choice.

#### THE PROPHETICAL BOOKS

##### Hebrews 1:1-2

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.

##### Hebrews 1:1-2 (NIV)

### 3. Review and back-review

Review the last 5 memorised verses once every day and back-review all other memorised verses once every three weeks.

### 4. Memorisation of the Bible books

*The 12 minor prophetic books:*

Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

<sup>1</sup> The text in the Greek Old Testament translation. "You will summon **nations (plural)** you know not, and **nations (plural)** that do not know you will hasten to you". Cf. Psalm 2:8; Isaiah 2:3.

## 13. The prophetic books

**The Old Testament prophetic books in chronological order are: Amos (788–737 B.C.), Jonah (783–743 B.C.), Hosea (754–714 B.C.), Isaiah (740–680 B.C.), Micah (737–727 B.C.), Nahum (660 B.C.), Zephaniah (639–630 B.C.), Jeremiah (627–586/550 B.C.), Daniel (605–537 and second century B.C.), Ezekiel (593–571 B.C.), Habakkuk (608–605 B.C.), Obadiah (after 586 B.C.), Haggai (520 B.C.), Zechariah (520–518 B.C.), Joel (500–400? B.C.) and Malachi (432–420 B.C.). Some of their prophecies were fulfilled in a *literal* way; others in another *non-literal* way. But all their prophecies must be explained in the light of the New Testament revelation!**

### A. The prophets in the Old Testament

#### 1. What is a prophet?

In the Old Testament ‘a prophet’ is someone who brings God’s message to people (Deuteronomy 18:18). The word, ‘to prophesy’ means ‘to proclaim’. The prophets received direct revelations through the direct inspiration of God’s Spirit (1 Peter 1:11). God’s revelation was brought to the awareness of the prophet in a supernatural way (Jeremiah 1:9; Ezekiel 2:2).

But every prophet maintained his own personality and character. Every prophet spoke in his own personal style. They made a clear difference between their own words and God’s words and declared that the revelations from God did not originate in their own hearts or minds (2 Peter 1:19–21), as was the case with the false prophets (Jeremiah 14:14) (*Read* Jeremiah 23:9–32 and Ezekiel 13:2–3, 17–23).

#### 2. How did the prophets prophesy?

The prophets revealed God’s messages in different ways: via words, actions (depictions) (Jeremiah 19:10–11a; 28:10), miracles (1 Kings 18:36–40; cf. 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:4) or writings (Jeremiah 30:2; 36:2, 28, 32).

Moreover, the prophets spoke to Israel in terms of what the Israelites could grasp. In their prophecies and descriptions concerning the coming Messiah and his kingdom, they made use of the Old Testament concepts as for example: the temple, the altar, the priesthood, the sacrifices, the circumcision, the land of Israel and the people of Israel.

#### 3. What did the prophets prophesy?

The prophets passed God’s words in the form of teachings, promises, exhortations, admonishments, warnings, and even threats. The prophets proclaimed revelations concerning *God* himself (*Read* Isaiah 40:11–31), concerning *God’s will* (law, commandments) and concerning *God’s eternal plan* (Isaiah 49:6; 56:3–8). They explained the *past* (Isaiah 48:3–6a; Jeremiah 2:11–13;

20–21), threw light on the *present* (Isaiah 48:17–18; Jeremiah 2:22), or revealed the *future* (Isaiah 48:6b–8a; Jeremiah 2:36–37; (*Read* Jeremiah 23:1–8; 29:10–13). Therefore ‘prophesying’ does not simply mean ‘predicting the future’!

But God sent his prophets especially at times Israel was going astray from God and God’s plan for Israel. Then God proclaimed his *righteous judgements* against his people (the exile) and his *gracious salvation* (the resettlement of Israel and Judah after their exiles to Assyria and Babylon). The prophets proclaimed God’s judgements against the surrounding nations (Jeremiah 1:5, 10; chapter 27; chapters 46 – 51; Ezekiel chapters 25 – 32). And they proclaimed God’s gracious promises to his people that turn from their evil ways and sins (Ezekiel 33:7–11) (*Read also* Ezekiel 33:12–20)!

Only a ‘*remnant*’ or ‘rest of survivors’ from God’s people in exile would repent from their evil ways and return to a renewed Israel and to the Mighty God (Isaiah 1:9; 10:20–23). ‘The Mighty God’ is Jesus Christ (compare Isaiah 10:21 with Isaiah 9:6). God would *rebuild* Israel right up to the coming of the Shepherd and the outpouring of the Spirit (i.e. the beginning of the New Testament period) (*Read* Ezekiel 34:11–24; 36:16–38).

#### 4. Conditional and unconditional prophecies

The prophecies in the Old Testament are either conditional or unconditional. God did not attach conditions to some prophecies in the Old Testament, e.g. the prophecies concerning the coming Messiah (Isaiah 9:6–7).

But God did attach conditions to most of his prophecies in the Old Testament. Already since the prophet Moses God *promised blessings for obedience* and *threatened curses for disobedience* (Deuteronomy chapters 27 – 28). This means that God proclaimed (prophesied, promised) to do something only if Israel held to the conditions attached. In the Old Testament God made promises to Israel concerning their future return to the land of Israel and concerning the future restoration of the land and the people. But these prophecies were always conditional! The prophecies (promises) would only be fulfilled when Israel remained faithful to God’s covenant and continued to obey his commandments. God *promised* Israel that godly sorrow, repentance (change of mind) and a right about turn back to God would cause God to withdraw his threats (Jeremiah 18:5–8)! But God also *threatened* Israel continually that he would withdraw his promises when Israel would backslide and fall away from the Living God (Jeremiah 18:9–12)!

God is sovereign and not under compulsion to fulfil his sovereign promises to a disobedient Israel or to a disobedient Christian congregation in our time!

## 5. Fulfilled and unfulfilled prophecies

What does the Bible teach about the fulfilment of prophecies (promises)?

Some prophecies in the Old Testament have already been fulfilled during the Old Testament period (Joshua 23:14; cf. 1 Kings 4:20-21).

Some prophecies in the Old Testament are threats (Joshua 23:15-16). The promises to Israel have been withdrawn due to disobedience (Jeremiah 18:11-12).

Some prophecies in the Old Testament have already been fulfilled during the New Testament in Jesus Christ (Luke 24:25-27,44-45).

Some prophecies in the Old Testament have been given to other people who bear the fruit of God's kingship in their lives (Matthew 21:41-44; 2 Corinthians 1:20; cf., Exodus 19:4-6 and 1 Peter 2:9-10).

Some prophecies in the Old Testament have been fulfilled in a much higher sense in the New Testament (Compare Isaiah 7:14-16 to Matthew 1:23. Compare also Isaiah 60:10-22 to Revelation chapter 21).

## 6. Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfilment

The whole Old Testament is actually a prophecy that finds its fulfilment in the New Testament.

### *The Old Testament institutions (study 9)*

The Law and the institutions of the people of Israel find their fulfilment in Jesus Christ and his kingdom (Matthew 5:17; Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 9:8-10; cf. Hebrews 10:1-18).

### *The Old Testament historical events (study 10)*

Certain historical events in the Old Testament such as the creation, the exodus and the return from exile are prophetic 'types' that find their spiritual fulfilment in the message of recreation, salvation and restoration in the New Testament.

### *The Old Testament theocracy (study 11)*

The theocracy in the Old Testament has now been fulfilled by the King of the kingdom, the Lord Jesus Christ.

### *The Old Testament nation of Israel in prophecy (study 13)*

The nation of 'Israel' finds her fulfilment in 'the Servant of the LORD' (Jesus Christ) (Isaiah 49:3; cf. Zechariah 3:8; Mark 10:45). God will display his glory in the coming Christ (called 'Israel') (Isaiah 4:2; 49:3; 55:5) and in the coming redeemed community (called Israel) (Isaiah 43:7; 46:13; 49:3) or Jerusalem (Zion) (Isaiah 52:1; 60:9,21; 61:3), which is the Body of Christ!

### *The Old Testament messianic prophecies (study 16)*

Many prophecies about the Messiah in the Old Testament find their real fulfilment in the New Testament in Jesus Christ.

## B. The explanation of the prophecies in the Old Testament

### 1. View the prophecies in the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament!

It is important to remember that the Old Testament and the New Testament together form one Book (the Bible)! The Bible from its beginning (the creation) to its end (the restoration) is one continuous revelation of God's plan and it becomes clearer as this history moves towards the end of the New Testament. All prophecies in the Old Testament must therefore be explained in the light of the New Testament revelation!

The New Testament revelation teaches us the following:

*There lies a veil over the Old Testament revelation which can only be removed by conversion to Jesus Christ.*

Therefore only a born-again believer in Jesus Christ is able to understand the Old Testament in the right way (2 Corinthians 3:14-16; 1 Peter 1:9-12).

*The institutions and some persons in the Old Testament are shadows, pictures or symbols of the realities that would come with Jesus Christ*

(Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5-6; 9:8-10; 10:1). The whole Old Testament with the land of Israel, the mountain of Zion, the city of Jerusalem, the temple, the ceremonial institutions, the prophets, the priests and the kings are not simply historical realities in the past history, but are also prophecies (predictions and proclamations) of future realities that would go into fulfilment on a much higher plane and to a much greater extent in Jesus Christ and the New Testament revelation (Matthew 5:17).

*God's Old Testament people (the believers in Israel) would not be terminated or replaced, but would be continued on this higher plane (where the shadows would be fulfilled in the realities) (Colossians 2:17) and enlarged (extended) to include the believers from all the Gentile nations (Colossians 3:11)!*

For example, the inheritance of 'the land of Israel' (Genesis 15:18) becomes the inheritance of the world (Romans 4:13). 'The earthly city of Jerusalem' becomes the heavenly city of Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-24). 'The temple' of stone in Jerusalem becomes the Church in the whole world (Ephesians 2:19-22). 'The elected and anointed prophets, priests and kings' in the Old Testament become Jesus Christ in the New Testament: the Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:18-19; Acts 3:18-23), the High Priest (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 7:20b-28) and the King (Isaiah 9:6-7; Revelation 17:14). 'The animal

sacrifices' are fulfilled in the death of Christ (Hebrews 9:11-14). And 'the covenant with Abraham' is fulfilled in the blessing of all nations (Acts 3:24-25).

#### *The old covenant is replaced by the new covenant*

The Old Testament contained the old (first) covenant (the Law) that was fulfilled and replaced in the New Testament by the new (second) covenant (Hebrews 7:12; 8:7-9).

*God's Old Testament people (the believers in Israel) only reach the perfection together with God's New Testament people (the Church)*

(Hebrews 11:39-40; cf. Ephesians 3:2-6)!

*No one has the authority or divine insight to explain the prophecies in the Old Testament apart from the New Testament revelation*

(2 Peter 1:19-21)! The revelation in the New Testament is the key for the correct explanation of the prophecies in the Old Testament! And that is why the Old Testament prophecies should not necessarily be interpreted literally or limited to the nation of Israel.

## **2. The New Testament reveals that some Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in a non-literal way**

Certain Old Testament prophecies not only have a provisional literal meaning in the Old Testament, but also have a final non-literal, much more far-reaching and symbolical significance in the New Testament. The New Testament reveals the real spiritual meaning and fulfilment.

#### *The literal mountain*

'Zion' is already during the Old Testament revelation a symbol of the believing people of Israel (Isaiah 49:14-16a), a symbol of the land of Israel (Jesaja 51:3) and a symbol of the city of Jerusalem (Isaiah 52:1-2).

But the New Testament revelation reveals that 'Mount Zion' is the same as 'the New Jerusalem', that is, the New Testament Church (Hebrews 12:22-24).

#### *The renewal of Jerusalem*

The description of the renewal of Jerusalem after the return from exile in Babylon (Isaiah 65:1-25) is a shadow of the new earth in the New Testament. The description in the Old Testament remains limited to the new land of Israel.

But in the light of the New Testament revelation it becomes clear that this renewal in Israel was a prophetic symbol of God's renewal of the whole earth. Not only the land of Israel (Isaiah 65:17), but the whole earth and the whole universe will be renewed (2 Peter 3:13)!

## **3. The New Testament reveals that the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies is not limited to Israel**

Only the New Testament revelation reveals the real intention of the Old Testament prophecies.

Two examples:

#### *The rebuilding of David's fallen tent*

The prophet Amos prophesied that 'David's fallen tent would be rebuilt' (Amos 9:11-12). This prophecy is explained in Acts 15:14-18.

Only in the light of the New Testament revelation do we know that the prophet Amos and James were not speaking of a future national restoration of the nation of Israel, but were speaking of the future building of the people of God coming from the Gentile nations!

#### *The outpouring of the Spirit*

The prophets Ezekiel and Joel prophesied about the future outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the changes this would bring in the people of Israel (Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:24-28; Joel 2:28-32). Without the explanation of the fulfilment of this prophecy in the New Testament these words could be understood as directed only to the national nation of Israel.

It is only in the light of the New Testament revelation that we know that the prophets Ezekiel and Joel were not only speaking of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Jews (*Acts* 2:16-21), but were also speaking of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the non-Jews (*Acts* 2:39; 11:14-18; 15:7-11).

## **4. The New Testament reveals that all the Old Testament prophecies were directed to all believers and not only to Israel**

#### *The word 'Israel' in the prophetic books*

The examples above point out that the word: 'Israel' in the Old Testament does not always refer to *the natural* nation of Israel (Romans 9:6a). Especially in the prophecies in the Old Testament the word: 'Israel' refers to the believers in the natural nation of Israel, thus, 'God's spiritual people' (Romans 9:6b)!

God's spiritual people during the Old Testament period consisted mainly of believers in Israel, but also contained believers from the Gentile nations (Isaiah 56:3-8).

Later in the New Testament period God's spiritual people consists of believing Jews and believing Gentiles (Romans 2:28-29; Galatians 6:14-16; Philippians 3:3)! The prophecies in the Old Testament are therefore intended for all people and not exclusively for Israel!

#### *The prophecies in the Old Testament*

Many Old Testament prophecies seem to be directed only to the nation of Israel.

However, the prophecies in the Old Testament find their fulfilment in the New Testament. In the light of the New

Testament revelation all promises in the Old Testament find their fulfilment, not in the nation of Israel, but in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20; cf. Isaiah 49:3)! The New Testament reveals that these prophecies are intended for all believers coming from all the nations (including believers from the nation of Israel)! (*Read Galatians 3:16-29*). However, this truth remained hidden until it was revealed in the New Testament revelation (Ephesians 3:2-6)!

### **5. The revelation of God consists of the Old and the New Testaments and is never extended thereafter**

Some false religions maintain that God's revelation in the Bible continues in their religion and they try to find proof for that in the Bible.

#### *First example: 'the Prophet' in Deuteronomy 18:18-19*

The false religion claims that this is a prophecy about the prophet of their own religion. However, Acts 3:13-24 clearly teaches that this prophecy about the future Prophet has already been fulfilled in Jesus Christ and in no one else in history, because no one else in history fits this description!

Only Jesus Christ is the Holy and Righteous One (the sinless One) (Acts 3:14). Only he is the Author of life (the Creator and Saviour). Only he suffered and died to wipe out the sins of believers. Only he was resurrected from the dead (Acts 3:15). And only he ascended into heaven where he remains until his second coming (Acts 3:21)! Only Jesus Christ turns people from their wicked ways (Acts 3:19). And only he blesses believers in every nation on earth (Acts 3:26)! All these facts have never been fulfilled in any other prophet or person!

All the prophets in the Old Testament foretold these days (Acts 3:24). However, the prophets in these other religions foretold nothing!

#### *Second example: 'the Counsellor' in John 7:37-39; 14:16-18*

The false religion claims that this is a prophecy about the prophet of their own religion. However the prophet of the other religion was not a Spirit, but only an ordinary human being. Their prophet did not come 'a few days' after the ascension of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:5), but came only hundreds of years later.

*Third example: so-called 'prophets' in some modern churches*  
Some Christians regard their own prophecies today as new and extended revelations from God. They regard themselves as 'mouthpieces of God' just like the Old Testament prophets. They claim this without any biblical warrant!

Jesus clearly teaches that the last Old Testament prophet was John the Baptist (Matthew 11:13). And the Bible clearly teaches that God spoke 'in the past' (during the

Old Testament period) through the Old Testament prophets, but 'in these last days' God has spoken his final and ultimate Word by his Son, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2)! In the Bible 'the last days' refers to the whole New Testament period from the first coming of Christ (Acts 2:17) to the second coming of Christ (John 6:39).

After the first coming of Christ and the completion of his revelation through his apostles two thousand years ago (John 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:13-15; Acts 1:8; Revelation 1:1), no more prophecies and revelations can be added to the revelation in the Bible. False prophets who nevertheless add their prophecies to the Bible will be severely judged (Revelation 22:18-19)!

After the first coming of Christ God speaks to us through the words written in the Bible! Paul therefore admonishes: that Christians must learn from the apostles the rule: "Do not go beyond what is written (in the Bible)" (1 Corinthians 4:6)!

## **C. Love is more important than explaining prophecies**

The explanation of prophecies and apocalyptic symbols in the Bible has already divided many Christians. This disunity can undermine the faith of those who are Christians and those who are interested in becoming Christians. The interpretation of prophecies must therefore remain subordinate to the clear teachings in the Bible that focus on love and transformation of life.

### **1. Commit yourself to the clear teaching in the Bible**

It is not the explanation of the prophecies concerning the second coming of Christ that give comfort and encouragement to Christians, but it is the fact that all Christians will certainly share in his glory, no matter how these future events will unfold (*Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11*)! It is more useful and beneficial to commit yourself to the very clear teachings in the Bible and to obey these. Occupy yourself rather with your personal relationship to God, to your family and to other people and with your God-given task in life. Devote yourself to bring the Good News to the people in the world, to make disciples, to build up the world-wide Body of Christ and especially to glorify God! All this is more important than arguing about the correct interpretation of the prophecies.

### **2. Explain prophecies with humility**

Jesus said: "It is not for you to know the times and dates the Father has set by his own authority" (Acts 1:7). Paul says: "About times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2). That is why 'the time' and 'the moment' of his second coming remain unpredictable! And that is why Christians need to interpret prophecies about the end-time with a great amount of humility. Because when personal

opinions about these future events are preached as if they are the only truth, but later appear to have been false, this mistake will undermine the faith of people instead of build it up!

### **3. Make love your aim and not knowledge**

Paul says: “If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:2). That is why loving one another is far more important than the correct knowledge of prophecies (Romans 13:10).

Decide ‘rather to lose the argument and win the man, than to win the argument and lose the man’.

### **4. Respond to a particular prophecy in the way the Holy Spirit intended**

When a prophecy is concerning a warning or threat, respond by repentance and a change of life. When a prophecy is concerning a promise, respond with gratefulness, joy, hope, encouragement, persistence and perseverance. The ultimate purpose of prophecies is not knowledge, but a change of life!