

Lesson #2: Character Study

Deeper Dive Into Key Old Testament Prophets and Prophecies

Our reading of the Old Testament is not just to acquaint ourselves with the history of the children of Israel, the geography of the old world, or the different people that existed during that time

- Our reading of the Old Testament gives us deep insights into the mind of Christ and the will of God, which is the salvation of mankind.
- Reading the Old Testament with the lens of the New Testament allows us to have a more intimate understanding of the deep love God has towards us
- The law from the Old Testament put into perspective how difficult it was to be made right with God. The magnitude of grace in the New Testament is exemplified in light of the Old Testament

“The New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New Testament” - St. Augustine

Now that we have reviewed the minor and major prophets and key historical events that took place in lesson 1, let's take a deeper dive into the lives of various prophets and discuss some of their prophecies, with a focus on “*Messianic prophecies*”

Miriam the Prophetess

- **Name meaning:** “Bitterness” or “Rebellion”
- **From:** Miriam was born to a Levite family during the enslavement of the Hebrews in Egypt.
- **Time period:** 13th century BC. She was active during the period of slavery in Egypt and the exodus out of Egypt, under the leadership of her brother Moses
- **Family:** She is the daughter of Amram and Jochebed and the older sister of Moses and Aaron.
- **Authored books in the Bible:** None. Her story is primarily found in Exodus and Numbers
- She is featured in a key passage in Exodus 15:20-21, where she leads the women of Israel in a song of praise after crossing the Red sea. This song, often referred to as the Song of Miriam praises God and his deliverance of the Israelites from Pharaoh's army. We also sing this Praise in the First Hosannas of the Midnight praises.

“20 Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. **21** And Miriam answered them:

“Sing to the Lord,
For He has triumphed gloriously!
The horse and its rider
He has thrown into the sea!” (Exodus 15: 20-21)

Significance:

- Miriam is often recognized as one of the first women to hold a prophetic role among the Israelites and as a leader who played a crucial part in the deliverance of her people. She is portrayed as a worship leader and a spiritual figure, whose faith and actions had a lasting impact on the Israelites.

“For I Brought you up from the Land of Egypt, I redeemed you from the house of bondage; And I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam” (Micah 6:4)

Messianic Prophecy and Fulfillment in the New Testament

- Miriam did not prophesy about the coming Messiah although her song of deliverance reminds us to celebrate God’s salvation of humanity through Jesus Christ

Isaiah the Prophet

- **Name meaning:** God is Salvation (“Yahweh is Salvation”) in Hebrew
- **From:** Jerusalem, Israel
- **Time period:** 8th century BC, approximately 700 years before the birth of Jesus
- **Family:** His father’s name was Amoz (not to be confused with the prophet Amos)
- **Authored books in the Bible:** Isaiah
- **Lived at the same time as:** Hosea, Amos and Micah
- **Ministered during the reign of:** Uzziah (Isaiah 1-5), Jotham (Isaiah 6), Ahaz (Isaiah 7-14), and Hezekiah (Isaiah 15-66)

Characteristics

1. Faithful
2. Eloquent
3. Courageous
4. Compassionate
5. Far-sighted
6. Hopeful

Significance

In about 742 BC, Isaiah received his call to prophecy through a vision described in Isaiah 6. He was a prophet of Judea (The Southern Kingdom). This vision is important for various reasons.

1. Isaiah 6 is the first time the seraphim are mentioned in the Bible. One of the seraphim flies to Isaiah with a live coal from the altar and touches his mouth with it.
 - It is then that Isaiah's iniquity is taken away and his sin purged.
 - This is done so Isaiah can guide the Israelites to repentance. We can think of this as a call for us to also repent.
2. Isaiah 6 is also the first time we hear the phrase **"Holy, Holy, Holy,"** signifying the triple and thus infinite holiness of God.
 - This same praise is used in the Liturgy today in the Coptic Church. It is known as the Cherubim hymn in the St. Basil Liturgy
3. Overwhelmed with God's holiness and desiring to help his people, Isaiah proclaims the famous verse, "Here am I! Send me." From this moment, Isaiah knew that this mission would not be an easy one, and would be faced with much bitterness and opposition.

6 "Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal *which* he had taken with the tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth *with it*, and said:

"Behold, this has touched your lips;
Your iniquity is taken away,
And your sin purged."

8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying:

"Whom shall I send,
And who will go for Us?"

Then I said, "Here *am I*! Send me." (Isaiah 6:6-8)

- This time was also the beginning of the westward expansion of the Assyrian empire, which threatened Israel and which Isaiah proclaimed to be a warning from God to a godless people. The Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel, whereas he was a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah
- While little is known about his family's status or involvements, Isaiah was very knowledgeable of his predecessor, Amos, and was also acquainted with both the rich and the poor. He was aware of the struggles of the nation and felt deeply for their salvation.

Examples of Messianic Prophecy and Fulfillment in the New Testament

The book of Isaiah is the most relevant book in terms of messianic prophecy and is often quoted in occasions like the nativity and the resurrection. He often talked about the suffering servant who would save humanity

Prophecy	Fulfillment in the New Testament
Christ will be born of a Virgin <i>“14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14)</i>	Matthew 1:22-23 <i>“22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 23 “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.”</i>
Christ’s coming into Egypt <i>“1 The burden against Egypt. Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt; The idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, And the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst. (Isiah 19:1)</i>	Matthew 2:13 <i>“13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.”</i>
Christ is the Suffering Servant <i>“3 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripe we are healed”(Isaiah 53:3)</i>	Philippians 2:7-8 <i>“7 but ^[a]made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”</i>
Christ will be the Cornerstone <i>16 Therefore thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily. (Isaiah 28: 16)</i>	Matthew 21: 42 <i>42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord’s doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes’?</i>

Interesting Facts

- The book of Isaiah is second only to the book of psalms as the most quoted book in the New Testament
- The book of Isaiah is like a mini-Bible: the first 39 chapters (like the 39 books of the Old Testament) are filled with judgement upon immorality, while the final 27 chapters (like the 27 books of the New Testament) declare a message of hope. In fact, it is sometimes called “The Gospel of Isaiah” or “The Fifth Gospel”.
- The word salvation is mentioned 26 times in Isaiah, but only 7 times in all of the other prophets combined.

Jeremiah the Prophet

- **Name meaning:** Yahweh will exalt
- **From:** Anathoth, Judah (few miles northeast of Jerusalem)
- **Time period:** 7th-6th century BC
- **Family:** His father’s name was Hilkiah and was a member of a priestly family
- **Authored books in the Bible:** Jeremiah, Lamentations
- **Lived at the same time as:** Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Ezekiel and Daniel
- **Ministered during the reign of:** Josiah son of Amon, Jehoiakim son of Josiah

Significance

- Jeremiah lived in a transitory time for the people of Israel. The Assyrian empire, which had taken over during the time of Isaiah, had now fallen. One of the most important events that occurred during Jeremiah’s prophetic years was the capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC and the exile of many Judeans to Babylon. This is what caused Daniel and the three youths to be taken into captivity.
- He is often known as the “**Weeping Prophet**” because of his deep sorrow over the sins of Israel and their refusal to turn back to God.
- Although Jeremiah is known for being faithful to God despite it causing him personal suffering and persecution, during his early call to prophecy he doubted his abilities to fulfill his vocation due to his young age and feeling of inadequacy

Then said I:
“Ah, Lord God!
Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth.”
But the Lord said to me:
“Do not say, ‘I am a youth,’
For you shall go to all to whom I send you,
And whatever I command you, you shall speak.

Do not be afraid of their faces,
For I am with you to deliver you,” says the Lord. (Jeremiah 1:4-8)

This passage teaches us a few things:

1. God has a purpose for each one of us before we were even born. He foresaw our potential and called us to live it.
 2. Because Jeremiah was still a youth, he felt unprepared and unworthy of the prophetic calling. But God calls us regardless of our age, status, reputation, etc. We all have something to contribute. God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called
 3. Our sense of weakness and insufficiency should make us go humbly about our work, yet it should not make us draw back when God calls us to it
- Jeremiah is also known for being rejected and alienated by his people. However, he could not let go of the compulsion to spread the word of God.

*O Lord, You induced me, and I was persuaded;
You are stronger than I, and have prevailed.
I am in derision daily;
Everyone mocks me.*
(Jeremiah 20:7)

Examples of Messianic Prophecy and Fulfillment in the New Testament

Prophecy	Fulfilment in the New Testament
The Genealogy of Jesus “Behold, <i>the days are coming</i> ,” says the Lord, “That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. ⁶ In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely...” (Jeremiah 23: 5-6)	Matthew 1:1 The Book of Matthew reviews the genealogy of Jesus and confirms that he is from the line of David and will reign as King in Righteousness 1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham....”
The New Covenant 31 “Behold, <i>the days are coming</i> , says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— 32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day <i>that</i> I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. 33 But this <i>is</i> the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after	Luke 22:20 Christ establishes this New covenant and speaks about it during the Last Supper 20 Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup <i>is</i> the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.

those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

Interesting Facts

- Jeremiah dictated his writings to his disciple Baruch
- The book of Jeremiah is the longest book in the Bible by word count
- At the end of his life, Jeremiah travelled to Egypt to continue calling people to repentance. Tradition suggests that his life ended by being stoned to death in Egypt by the Jews

David the King and Prophet

- **Name Meaning:** “Beloved” in Hebrew
- **From:** Bethlehem, Tribe of Judah
- **Time Period:** 10th Century BCE.
- **Family:** Son of Jesse, from the tribe of Judah
- **Authored Books of the Bible:** Psalms (Credited with writing 73 of the 150 psalms)
- David was the King of Israel who ruled for approximately 30 years and was known for his heart for God. He was anointed by the Prophet Samuel as King, when Saul, the son of Kish, disobeyed the commandment of God. David’s reign brought unity to Israel and he established Jerusalem as the capital

14 “But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.” (1 Samuel 13: 14)

Significance

- David was born 1120 years before Christ
- David is credited with Israel's unification of the 12 tribes of Israel into one Kingdom which laid the foundation for the nation’s greatness under Solomon.

Characteristics

1. Meek and Humble
2. Obedient
3. Brave
4. Repentant

Examples of Messianic Prophecy and Fulfillment in the New Testament

Prophecy	Fulfillment in the New Testament
<p>Christ will be pierced</p> <p>16 “For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; 17 I can count all My bones. They look <i>and stare at Me</i>” (Psalm 22: 16- 17)</p>	<p>Luke 23:23</p> <p>²³But they were insistent, demanding with loud voices that He be crucified. And the voices of these men ^[1]and of the chief priests prevailed. ²⁴So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested.</p>
<p>Christ’s garments will be divided</p> <p>18 They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots” (Psalm 22: 18)</p>	<p>John 19: 23-24</p> <p>²³Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. ²⁴They said therefore among themselves, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be,”</p>
<p>Christ’s bones will not be broken</p> <p>“He guards all his bones; Not one of them is broken” (Psalm 34:20)</p>	<p>John 19:32</p> <p>“³²Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. ³³But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs”</p>
<p>Christ’s Resurrection</p> <p>8 “I have set the Lord always before me; Because <i>He is at my right hand</i> I shall not be moved. 9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope. 10 For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption” (Psalm 16:8-10)</p>	<p>Acts 2:25-26</p> <p>In his Pentecost sermon, Peter cites this verse in Acts to explain that Jesus resurrection fulfills the prophecy that the Messiah resurrected</p> <p><i>“25 For David says concerning Him:</i></p> <p><i>‘I foresaw the Lord always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. 26 Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. 27 For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. 28 You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.’”</i></p>

Christ will be betrayed by a friend

“Even my own familiar friend in who I trusted,
Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against
me” (Psalm 41: 9)

Matthew 10: 4

“Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot,
who also betrayed Him”

Micah the Prophet

- **Name Meaning:** “Who is like Yahweh?”
- **Time Period:** 8th century BCE in the southern Kingdom of Judah in the city of Moresheth (contemporary of Isaiah in Jerusalem)
- **Ministered during the reign of:** Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah
- **Authored Books in the Bible:** The Book of Micah

Significance

- Micah is known to be a prophet of judgement but also of hope and restoration.
- He also emphasized social justice, calling for compassion towards the poor and needy. For that reason, he is sometimes called the “Prophet of the Poor”. Micah 6:8 is reflected to be a summary of God’s expectation for His people: Justice, mercy and humility

He has shown you, O man, what is good;
And what does the Lord require of you
But to do justly,
To love]mercy,
And to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

- Micah prophesied during a time of political instability, as Israel was nearing destruction by the Assyrians and Judah was struggling with its own corruption.
- Micah’s prophecies were a combination of judgement of Israel and Judah for their sins and hope for future restoration
- Micah famously prophesied the birthplace of the Messiah
- The church fathers agree that this book is rich in symbols (ex. baptism, looking at Mount Zion as a symbol of the Church)

Examples of Messianic Prophecy and Fulfillment in the New Testament

Prophecy	Fulfilment in the New Testament
King of the Jews <i>“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.” (Micah 5:2)</i>	Matthew 2:1-2 <i>“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”</i>

John the Baptist

- **Name meaning:** "Yahweh is Gracious" or "God is Gracious" in Hebrew
- **From:** Judea, specifically the region near the Jordan River
- **Time period:** 1st century AD,
- **Family:** Son of Zechariah (a priest) and Elizabeth, a relative of Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:5-25)
- **Ministered during the reign of:** King Herod the Great and later his sons, in the region of Judea and along the Jordan River preaching baptism and remission of sins
- **Authored books in the Bible:** While John the Baptist did not author any books in the Bible, his life and message are extensively referenced in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Characteristics

- **Bold :** John was not afraid to confront both the people and the religious leaders of his time, calling them to repentance.
- **Humble:** He famously stated that he was not worthy to untie the sandals of Jesus (Matthew 3:11, John 1:27).
- **Ascetic:** Lived a simple, austere life in the wilderness, wearing clothes made of camel's hair and eating locusts and wild honey (Matthew 3:4).
- **Uncompromising:** He confronted sin directly and called people to repentance, even when it meant confronting powerful figures like King Herod (Mark 6:18-20).

Significance

- **Role as the Forerunner of Christ:**

- John's primary mission was to prepare the way for Jesus, the Messiah. His ministry fulfilled the prophecy from **Isaiah 40:3**

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.'"

- He is often referred to as the last of the Old Testament prophets, bridging the gap between the Old and New Testament eras, calling the Jewish people to repent and be baptized in anticipation of the coming Messiah

"In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea" (Matthew 3: 1)

- John the Baptist's prophecies primarily focused on calling people to repentance, preparing them for the coming of the Messiah, and warning of God's coming judgment. He is not typically regarded as a foreteller of specific events in the same way as Old Testament prophets, but his message was prophetic in its call to spiritual readiness for Jesus' arrival.

Messianic Prophecy and Fulfillment in the New Testament

Prophecy	Fulfillment in the New Testament
Christ is the Lamb of God: <i>"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Jesus, as the sacrificial Lamb, fulfills this prophecy by being crucified for the sins of humanity (John 19:30).
The Baptism of the Holy Spirit: <i>"I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'" (John 1:33)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Fulfillment in the New Testament: Jesus baptized believers with the Holy Spirit, especially at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).
God's final judgement <i>²His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Matthew 3:12)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ John the Baptist speaks to the pharisees and Sadducees to explain the importance of genuine repentance. He talks about the coming judgement and how Jesus will separate the wheat (the righteous) from the chaff (the wicked, those who reject the truth)

Abouna Tadros Malaty Commentary (Matthew 3:12)

Today the righteous are living with the evil ones, the believers with the unbelievers, until the great day of the Lord comes in which He Himself will do the selection. His winnowing fork will be His hand, not given to anyone else. He alone knows the hearts, and is able to separate the wheat from the chaff in great wisdom, with no mistakes whatsoever.

Summary Table for the Character Study:

Prophet	Time Period	Key Characteristics	Significance
Miriam	13th century BCE	Sister of Moses, prophetess, leader	Led in worship after Exodus, role in salvation
David	10th century BCE	King of Israel, a man after God's heart	King of Israel, ancestor of Jesus
Isaiah	8th century BCE	Visionary, bold, saw Messiah's coming	Prophesied about Messiah, judgment, and salvation
Micah	8th century BCE	Prophet of justice, hope, and restoration	Prophesied Messiah's birthplace
Jeremiah	7th-6th century BCE	Prophet of Judgement, sorrow and hope	Foretold the new covenant and the coming of the Messiah
John the Baptist	1st century AD	Forerunner, baptizer, voice in the wilderness	Prepared the way for Jesus' ministry