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Understanding the Prophets (Part 1)



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg provides insights into understanding the Old Testament prophets. He emphasizes that prophets are people who speak forth an inspired word from God and deliver it to the people, often in the form of visions, dreams, or hearing God speak to them. The purpose of prophecy was to exhort, edify, and comfort the people of God. Gregg explains how reading the Old Testament prophets alongside the New Testament writers' interpretation can provide a clearer understanding.

Transcript

When I first read through the Bible, I didn't really read through the Bible. I have to confess to you. The first several times I read through the Bible, I didn't read all the way through.

And the reason was I got discouraged, especially when it came to some of the prophetic books. I confess, Ezekiel was the one that held out the longest against me. I tried to read through the Bible on many occasions, and I just couldn't.

get through Ezekiel for many years. But not only Ezekiel, but all the prophets had certain things about them that just, if I read through them at all, I just kind of plowed through them understanding only bits and pieces. And the bits and pieces that I thought I understood were the bits and pieces that were often quoted passages, you know, Messianic passages about Christ, Isaiah 53, for example, or passages that I had heard taught from an eschatological standpoint like Ezekiel 38 and 39 about Gog and Magog, and passages that had, you know, been taken by themselves outside their context and taught to me over the years and had become familiar to me by that means, and I understood them only insofar as my teachers had explained them to me.

And of course, I would say now in some cases I didn't understand them at all because I don't think my teachers were correct on some of the things. But I am well aware of the challenge that the prophets present to a Christian reader. A pastor friend of mine confessed to me privately once that he had never read through the entire Old Testament because of the prophets being so difficult.

I've heard other pastors say that the minor prophets in particular have been very difficult for them. My own experience with the prophets changed by necessity when I began teaching the Great Commission School in 1983 because we made a commitment to teach the whole Bible verse by verse to a group of students, and whatever I didn't have somebody else available to teach, I had to teach. And it was much easier to find people to teach New Testament books than to teach Old Testament books, and it was impossible to find anyone to come teach the prophets.

So by default that responsibility fell to me, and so I taught the prophets every year for 16 years as I ran the Great Commission School. Some of them I taught additional times because during that time I began teaching for youth of the mission in their school of biblical studies, and they often had me come and teach prophetic books too, because it is hard to find people to teach them, because they're just not that familiar to Christians. And when I first had to teach the prophets, I did so with much fear and trembling, not only the first time but the second and third time as well.

Eventually though, because I was forced to do so, I became more familiar with them and found out they're not really as difficult as I first thought. Nothing is as difficult as you first think it is when you first encounter it, but they are still somewhat difficult of course. But one thing that helped me a lot was when I stopped being a dispensationalist, I could actually read the prophets and take them for what they said to me and what the New Testament writers said they said.

Whereas when I was a dispensationalist, basically the prophets, like I said, knowledge of the prophets or treatment of the prophets in dispensationalism is usually pretty anecdotal. There's a place here, a place there, a place there, a place there, that is thought to talk about some thing that is expected to happen in the last days, and so you get it taught on. The rest of it you don't pay much attention to and you can't really make much sense of.

But what helped me the most of course was not only teaching through the prophets, but teaching through the prophets in conjunction with teaching through the New Testament. Because the New Testament writers were very fond of the prophets. They apparently didn't have the problems modern Christians have with them at all.

But that's largely due to the fact that they were inspired. That is, the New Testament writers were inspired and they, through inspiration, came to understand the prophets in ways that we might not and maybe no one would without inspiration from the Holy Spirit. But fortunately for those of us who want to understand the Old Testament prophets, the New Testament writers quoted extensively from them.

And in their quotations they apply passages from the prophets in specific contexts that give away to us as we read them what the New Testament writers understood those prophets to be talking about. And that was really the eye-opener for me and that's what

really opened up the prophets to me, things that I would have thought they meant, because of my conditioning as a dispensationist before, were entirely different than what the apostles apparently thought they meant. And once I allowed the apostles to decide what they meant rather than me and my teachers, it's comfortable.

It's actually much more, I don't know, it's much less challenging to me. And I want to give you some of the tools, some of the things I think would help you and that I wish somebody would have given me. I had to kind of discover these things through my own study because I was just kind of thrown into the deep end of having to teach them without knowing anything about them.

That's really a stressful thing when you're required to teach something you don't know anything about. And so I just had to learn to sink or swim and I think I learned how to swim and so I'd like to give you some swimming lessons so you don't have to sink when you try to read the prophets. Let's begin with the question of what is a prophet? At the very basic definition, a prophet is a person who speaks forth an inspired word from God.

He's not simply an angry old man who's got something in his craw and got a lot of opinions. He's not even a very enlightened preacher necessarily. He's somebody who receives an oracle from God.

This oracle can come in the form of a vision or a dream or it can be hearing God speak to them. But they hear from God in ways that most people do not. And when they speak, they speak as if it was God speaking.

They actually can say thus says the Lord. And they speak from God as if it is God speaking in the first person through their mouth. Now, there is a gift of prophecy in the New Testament also.

And I might say right at the outset that many Christian teachers have said that the prophet in the Old Testament was a different kind of thing than a prophet in the New Testament. They say the gift of prophecy in the Old Testament, and I've lost track of how many times I've heard this said by teachers, that the gift of prophecy in the Old Testament is the gift of foretelling the future. But that the gift of prophecy in the New Testament is more foretelling the word of the Lord.

Anyone ever heard that distinction made? Very common to say that. That the Old Testament prophet foretold the future. The New Testament prophet foretells the word of God, meaning he basically is an inspired preacher more than anything else.

He preaches a word from the Lord to people. Now, I have simply never found any evidence in Scripture that this distinction exists between the Old Testament and the New Testament prophets. The Old Testament prophets do indeed foretell the future, but they spend far more time preaching than they spend predicting anything.

If foretelling means preaching, as opposed to predicting, foretelling, then the Old Testament prophets were primarily preaching and only occasionally predicting. They didn't predict a lot, but they preached even more. On the other hand, when you encounter prophets in the New Testament, and there's not very many people in the New Testament who are identified for us as prophets.

One of them that is, is a guy named Agabus. In Acts chapter 11, and again in Acts chapter 20, Agabus appears, and both times that he speaks he's foretelling the future. He predicts a famine that came later on, over in Acts chapter 11, and he also foretold that Paul would be bound when he came to Jerusalem.

So we have foretelling by the prophet in the New Testament, and we have foretelling by prophets in the Old Testament, and this is just the reverse of what is so commonly said to be the case. It's supposed to be the other way around. But as near as I can tell, a prophet is a prophet regardless what testament they're in.

And a prophet does preach, and a prophet does foretell. Once I was baptized in the Spirit and came to believe in the gifts of the Spirit for today, I was much more free to see a New Testament prophet in the same light as an Old Testament prophet. The non-charismatic position on this generally is that a prophet is simply an inspired preacher.

If you have Ken Taylor's Living Bible, you probably don't anymore. It's been replaced by newer things than that, but when he paraphrased, when Paul was talking about the gift of prophecy, Ken Taylor paraphrased that as inspired preaching. So you could get the impression reading from a Bible like that, that if your preacher seems to be rather inspired or inspiring, the preacher you listen to on Sunday morning, that maybe he's a prophet.

But to say he's an inspired preacher means much more than to say he's the man who's giving an inspiring message. A prophet was so inspired that he could say, this is God speaking. He could say, this is God speaking.

Thus says God. Thus says the Lord. I have decreed this.

I have declared this. This is my opinion. This is my thoughts.

This is my commands. Paul was able, for example, to say, if any man is spiritual or thinks himself spiritual or a prophet, let him acknowledge that the things I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. Now, most preachers and the pulpit can't say that about their own words, but a prophet could.

And in the Old Testament, the prophets were raised up because God had an intention to make himself known and his will known to a particular people, and we know that was the people of Israel. And the first great prophet to arise among them was Moses. Actually, Abraham is the first man that the Old Testament calls a prophet.

When Abimelech had taken Sarah into his harem, thinking she was Abraham's sister, God had closed the wombs of all of Abimelech's harem. And God confronted Abimelech about this deal and Abimelech repented and all. And God said to him, well, go and restore the man's wife to him because he is a prophet, meaning Abraham is a prophet.

But we don't really have specimens of Abraham's prophesying, but God did appear to him and speak to him. And generally speaking, what causes a man to be a prophet is that he gets some kind of revelation, direct revelation from God, whether it's a dream or a vision or whatever. And he hears from God and for the most part, prophets speak that out.

That's usually what makes them a prophet. But Abraham, I don't know if he had any audience wandering around alone in the desert, but God did appear to him as he appeared to prophets. Moses is the first one who is really recognized as a great prophet and he was unlike any other prophet in Israel.

He did receive revelations from God, he did speak for God, and he is considered the greatest of the prophets, but he's not really in it. He's in a class by himself. If you look at Numbers chapter 12, in this story, Moses had married an Ethiopian woman and this caused criticism to come his way from his sister and his brother, Miriam and Aaron.

And God stood with Moses on this and rebuked Miriam and Aaron. And among the things that God said was in verse 6, Numbers 12, 6, God said, Hear now my words. If there is a prophet among you, I, Yahweh, make myself known to him in a vision, I speak to him in a dream.

Not so with my servant Moses, for he is faithful in all my house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, not in dark sayings, and he sees the form of Yahweh. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? So God says, I do speak to my prophets through dreams and visions, but Moses is in a different class.

The degree to which God confided in Moses, the degree to which God confided in Moses, and the intensity of the revelation that he gave Moses is second to none, not even equal to any others. But Moses was a prophet. Before him, there were prophets too.

We just don't have any sampling in the Old Testament of their prophesying. Actually, Jesus indicated that Abel was a prophet, and no doubt the earliest of the prophets, unless Adam was. But in, I believe it's the 11th chapter of Luke, around verse 11, Jesus said, all the blood of the prophets that was shed would come upon that generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah.

Thus, Jesus included Abel as the first of the prophets, so we have no sampling of his prophesying. Moses would generally be understood to be the first man that God spoke to his people Israel through. Of course, he established the nation.

But Moses predicted there would be other prophets after him that would come. Before he died, he said in Deuteronomy 18 that there will be, God will raise up another prophet, like unto me. And while the New Testament writers understood this to be primarily a reference to Christ, the Messiah, it's also possible that Moses was saying that at any given time that God wants to speak after Moses is gone, God will raise up a prophet for that time as well.

The prophet par excellence would be the Messiah himself. But God did raise up prophets after Moses. An order of prophets, the Jews understood to be begun with Samuel.

Before Samuel's time, there was the period of the Judges. That filled in the space between Joshua and Samuel, the period of the Judges. It could have been as much as 480 years or 300 something years, no one knows the exact length of time, but it was several hundred years.

And at the end of that time, the last of the Judges was also the first of the normal prophets. I say normal to contrast him with Moses, who was not normal. And Samuel organized groups of prophets.

If you read the book of 1 Samuel and the books of 1 Kings, actually both the books of Samuel and Kings, they contain references to these sons of the prophets. They weren't really the offspring of the prophets, they were just referred to that because they were disciples of the prophets. Samuel organized five different, what some theologians would call schools of the prophets.

We don't know that they were being taught anything, but they were fellowships of prophets. Young prophets that Samuel organized in five different centers and which later prophets after Samuel also oversaw. Elijah in his day oversaw these groups of the prophets and Elisha apparently did in his day as well.

And perhaps there was a leading prophet who oversaw them through all the generations, though we don't know all their names. The main thing about a prophet though was that when he spoke, he wasn't just giving an opinion, he wasn't just giving an interpretation. There was a difference between a prophet speaking and a rabbi speaking or a priest speaking.

The priests were entrusted with the law and they were to teach the law. The Levites and the priests were supposed to be the teachers of the law of Moses. They taught the Torah to the people.

But they were not infallible. They were like any Bible teacher today. They taught it as best they understood it and that's the best they could hope to do.

A prophet, however, didn't teach the Torah in the strict sense of the word. He gave a current, timely word from God. It was always in agreement with the Torah and it was

usually calling people back to Torah observance, that is, observing the law, because the people often wandered away from it.

But when the prophet spoke, he didn't give a Bible study. He didn't open the scriptures and say, now let me explain what this means. Nehemiah did that.

Ezra did that. The scribes did that. The priests did that.

But the prophets didn't have to do that. They got their oracle straight from God and they spoke it to the people. And it wasn't just an exposition on the old law.

It was what God was saying. It was a word in season to the people of God at any given time. That's what a prophet was.

Now the purpose of prophets was, well Paul says the purpose of prophecy in the New Testament, and as I said, I don't know that there's any grounds for saying it's any different than in the Old. In chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians in verse 3, Paul said, He who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. And when you read the Old Testament prophets, they exhort, they do edify, and they comfort.

And that would probably be the main thing, that God was always wanting to speak to His people. Not just through a book, but through a living voice. And that's what the prophets were there for.

After God gave the law, He could have just disappeared for thousands of years and just said, you've got the law, just follow it. But God's a communicating God. He's a God who likes to relate with His people.

And He hears their prayers and He speaks to them. And when He speaks to them, it was through the prophetic spirit. A person prophesied in the Old Testament when the Holy Spirit came upon Him.

And you might remember the story in the 13th chapter, 11th chapter of Numbers, where God, in the Old Testament, told Moses that He could share some of the responsibility of leading the people by bringing 70 of the elders of the people to the tabernacle, and God would put His spirit on them, as the spirit was on Moses. So Moses brought these 70 elders to the door of the tabernacle, and the Holy Spirit came upon them, and it says they prophesied. Now two of these men weren't where they should be, Eldad and Medad, they were in the camp, and they were prophesying too.

And this bothered Joshua apparently, and he said, Moses, tell them not to do so. And Moses said, are you jealous for my sake? He said, would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that He would put His spirit upon them. It would be to the advantage of the church of God, to the people of God, if everyone were prophets, and God would put His spirit upon them.

Well, that's exactly what has happened, as a matter of fact, in one sense. Because Joel said, and Joel was a prophet who lived sometime after Moses, in Joel chapter 2, he said, the day is coming when I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, says the Lord, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions. And upon my handmaidens and my menservants in those days, I will pour out of my spirit, and they will prophesy.

So a general outpouring of the spirit, the prophetic spirit on all God's people was predicted. Moses had wished for it, Joel predicted it, and the apostles witnessed it on the day of Pentecost. And when that thing was witnessed, not only by the apostles and the 120 in the upper room, but also many thousands of pilgrims who were in Jerusalem when the spirit fell on the day of Pentecost, Peter said, this is that which Joel spoke about, when he said, in the last days I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, and your sons and daughters will prophesy.

So what has happened is that God has given his prophetic spirit to all of his people. In the Christian church, the spirit of God belongs to all Christians, and he communicates as he did through the prophets of old. Now some Christians have a gift of prophecy, according to Paul, and not all have the gift of prophecy, but all have the prophetic spirit living in them if they're Christians, because the spirit of God, which inspired the prophets, now lives in the believers so that the believers should be capable of receiving direct communication from God in a way that the average Jewish man did not.

The prophets did, but most Jews did not. God spoke only through a few men who are prophets in the Old Testament. Whereas now every Christian can hear from God.

That's exactly what Jeremiah said would happen. In Jeremiah 31, God said, I'll make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the old covenant which I made with their fathers when they came out of Egypt. He said, this is the covenant I'll make with them.

I will write my word on their hearts and put my laws in their inward parts, and they shall not have to say to each other, no, the Lord, because they'll all know me, from the greatest to the least of them. That is to say, unlike the old covenant, where only a few people really had direct communication from God, God would write his laws and his words in the hearts of all of his people in the new covenant, and they'd all know him firsthand. They would all have a conversant relationship with him.

And that doesn't mean that if you're a Christian you hear voices, or that God speaks to you in an audible voice, but it certainly means that God's spirit who lives in you communicates in some way or another with you. If you're a Christian very long, you may be so acquainted with it that it doesn't even seem supernatural anymore. Sometimes people want some kind of a spooky or mystical word from the Lord, and if they don't get that, they think maybe they're not hearing anything from God.

But he writes the words on your heart. And they come when God speaks to you. It should be so natural for a person who's born of the spirit that it feels natural, not supernatural.

You just get a sense of conviction about something, or you get an insight about something that the Holy Spirit gives you, or you get a sense that God would have you do a certain thing. And it's not that you get into some kind of mystical revelation that you could put your finger on it like, wow, I got a buzz in the spirit there and got this word from God. Some people do get that.

Those would be the ones, I guess, who have the gift of prophecy, which I don't. But I would certainly say that once I was filled with the Spirit, I certainly came to know God leading me. The Bible says, as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

So the same number of people that are the children of God are the number who are led by the Spirit of God. That wasn't true in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, the majority of Jewish people didn't have any direct contact with the Spirit of God except through the mediation of prophets.

And so, some of these prophets wrote stuff, and some didn't. There's a whole class of prophets that we call the non-writing prophets. I mean, some very important prophets didn't write anything.

Elijah never wrote any books that we know of. Elisha didn't. And they were among some of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament.

They just didn't leave anything in writing. There were books written about them, but they apparently didn't write anything themselves. There's a lot of unnamed non-writing prophets, like the prophet from Judea who went up and rebuked the altar that Zerubbabel built and withered the king's hand momentarily and then healed it.

And that prophet was later killed by a lion because another unnamed old prophet tested him to see if he would be obedient to God, and he failed the test and he was slain by a lion. A difficult story. But the point is, there's a number of prophets in the Old Testament whose names are never given and who never wrote anything.

So there were a lot more prophets around than we know the names of. But the ones we're most familiar with, no doubt, are the ones who left writings for us. The writing prophets, of which there were four that we usually call major prophets - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

And then there are twelve that are usually called minor prophets. The Jews didn't call the twelve the minor prophets, they just called them the twelve. What we call the minor prophets in the Jewish Bible is simply called the twelve.

And it's one document that has all twelve of them in it. They're short books by twelve different guys. But at least their names are on there and we know who they are, something about them.

And it is reading their books that we're wanting to know something about tonight. We want to know how to read and understand what they said. And they are somewhat difficult.

But the reason - somebody asked me last night - it wasn't here because I wasn't here last night - but someone asked me last night, why don't Protestants put the first book of Maccabees in their Bible? The Roman Catholic Bible has a number of books that ours does not have - that is, the Protestant Bible does not have. All of them are Old Testament era books. But Maccabees is a history book.

There's actually two books of Maccabees in the Catholic Bible, and first Maccabees in particular is a respectable historical document with important and interesting information in it. And Protestants often refer to the information in Maccabees as historical, because it is. But someone said, well, why don't we accept Maccabees in the Bible if it's true? And the reason would be because it is not believed that Maccabees was written by a prophet.

You see, the Bible, the Old Testament is written by men who were inspired by God. A man who was inspired by God is a prophet. So, the books that belong in the inspired scriptures have to have been written by men who were inspired, and were therefore of that class of prophets.

Moses was a prophet, so he wrote the first five books. Joshua was no doubt a prophet, and he no doubt wrote the book of Joshua. It's not known who wrote the book of Judges.

It may have been Samuel. He was a prophet. The books of 1 and 2 Samuel were not written by Samuel, but they seem to have been a compilation of books written by Gad, Nathan, and Samuel, put together by somebody else later, but still having the prophetic writings as their source.

The books of Kings are believed to have been written by Jeremiah. At least the Jews believe Jeremiah wrote the books of Kings. David was a prophet, and he wrote the Psalms, the largest book in the Old Testament.

The five books that Solomon wrote, he's never really called a prophet. We know that God inspired him. God appeared to him and said, ask anything, and he asked for wisdom, so God said, I'm going to give you wisdom.

So, the wisdom literature he wrote is considered to be inspired. And then we have the books of the prophets, the major prophets and the minor prophets. So, everything that is in our Old Testament is written by somebody who is believed to have been a prophet,

with a few exceptions.

The books of Chronicles Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. It is believed that all of those books except Esther were written by Ezra, and he is never called a prophet. He is simply called a scribe.

And therefore, those books are in a different class for some reason. And I won't discuss the canonicity of those books necessarily, but for the most part, a book is included in the Old Testament if it's written by a prophet. And there's no reason to believe that Ezra couldn't have been a prophet as well as a scribe.

A lot of the prophets were priests or scribes also. Anyway, the point here is that when we come to the prophetic writings, we need to know, are we reading something that's inspired or just somebody venting? Because a lot of the content is complaining. If you read the prophets, it's real negative stuff mostly.

Prophets don't usually come along when everything is going well. The prophets came along and wrote books when things were going badly, when the nation of Israel or Judah were apostate, they were wandering from God, when God had a complaint and he was about to judge them, so he'd warn them by sending prophets. So when the prophets came, they usually had kind of a negative word.

There's one non-writing prophet named Micaiah mentioned in the book of 1 Kings chapter 22. We don't know anything about him except this little story of when Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, was visiting Ahab, the king of Israel, and Ahab wanted to enlist the support of Judah to go and fight against the Syrians at Ramoth Gilead to recover some land that had been taken from Ahab by the Syrians. And Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, will you go with me to fight against the Syrians at Ramoth Gilead and recover that land? And Jehoshaphat was a godly man, Ahab was not.

Jehoshaphat said, well, let's inquire of the Lord about this. So all the prophets of Ahab's court were brought in, and they all said, oh yeah, go, fight, win, prosper. But Jehoshaphat noticed none of them were prophesying in the name of Yahweh.

And so he said, isn't there a prophet of Yahweh anywhere around here we could consult? And Ahab said, oh, there's one other guy named Micaiah, but I don't like him, he always prophesies bad stuff. And Jehoshaphat said, nonsense, bring him in here. And so, sure enough, Micaiah did prophesy bad stuff.

He prophesied that Ahab would die at Ramoth Gilead. And Ahab turned to Jehoshaphat and said, didn't I tell you, he always says bad stuff. Well, that's what a real prophet usually did.

They were usually kind of negative. Not because God is negative, but because the prophets often had to deal with the religious situation they were sent to, and that was

usually an apostate people of God. Israel and Judah were apostate more often than they were not.

And therefore, we read a lot of negative stuff, bad news in the prophets. But, as Paul said, he that prophesies speaks to exhortation and edification and comfort to the church, there is also comfort in all the prophets. All the prophets have something very comforting to say.

In addition to giving God's complaint and His threats of judgment, there is a call to repent and there is always promises to those who are the remnant of His salvation and of His favor that He will show to them. So, there is always something comforting. But, as I said, when you read all this negative stuff, it's important to know, is this really God, or is this guy just got something in his craw and he's just saying it's God? Well, this was something that was very important to know, because God was very angry at prophets who said they were speaking for Him and they really weren't.

The book of Jeremiah has some chapters devoted to excoriating these people who spoke in the name of the Lord, but they weren't really sent by the Lord. They were just making it up. And God's angry when people speak in His name and they're not really speaking for Him.

In fact, in the Old Testament, if a person spoke in God's name and it was found that he was not speaking truly for God, he would be stoned to death. This is found in Deuteronomy chapter 18, which is the passage where we also find how you know if somebody really is a true prophet or not. Because anyone might say they are, and anyone who's been in charismatic churches knows that anyone can claim to be a prophet, whether they are or not.

And I am frequent in charismatic circles. I attend a Pentecostal church myself fairly regularly now. I'm not a Pentecostal, but certainly when you're around groups that believe in the gifts of the Spirit, as I do believe in the gifts of the Spirit, they often believe that just anybody is a prophet.

And a lot of people will just speak up for God and say, Thus saith the Lord, when in many cases there's much reason to doubt that they really have an inspired word from God. In fact, at one church in Santa Cruz, there was a meeting where, it's not the church I attend now, but two people stood up in a row in rapid succession and both gave prophecies, one flatly contradicted the other one. The first person who prophesied said, Thus saith the Lord, and gave a word.

The other one stood up and it was clear they were specifically trying to contradict the other one. And they both said, Thus saith the Lord. Well, that's awkward when that happens.

But the thing is that just because someone says, Thus saith the Lord, doesn't mean that they're really speaking from God. So how do you know? Well, there's this famous test in Deuteronomy chapter 18. There's actually two tests given in Deuteronomy.

One of them is in chapter 18 and verses 21 and 22. It says, And if you say in your heart, how shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken? And this is in the context of prophets who speak in the name of the Lord and it's not really from the Lord. He says, Well, when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken.

The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You shall not be afraid of him. So, one way you know if a person is not a true prophet and is not speaking from the Lord is if they predict something and it doesn't happen.

There are some rather famous media preacher celebrities that have prophesied a whole string of things that have never happened. Some of them still have a reputation of being men of God and women of God among their followers. But they've proven themselves to be false prophets many times by prophesying things that didn't happen.

I've encountered this many times from people who claim to be prophets, some of them lesser known, not celebrity types, but in the circles I've been in there's been plenty of people who've told me they're prophets and the things they've prophesied more often than not don't come true. And they've proven themselves to be false prophets. You don't have to worry about someone like that.

That is, you don't have to listen to their prophecy. You don't have to pay them any heed because they're not speaking from God. They're speaking from their own spirit, not from the spirit of God.

So if someone predicts something and it doesn't come true, they're not really speaking from God because God knows the future and can speak accurately about when he wants to. In chapter 13 of Deuteronomy we have another test that in a sense goes a step beyond the one we just read about. Because it says in the first three verses, if there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams and he gives you a sign or a wonder and the sign or the wonder comes to pass of which he spoke.

He's saying let us go and serve other gods which you've not known. Let us serve them. You shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Now here's a case where a sign and a prediction is made by a prophet and it really does happen. Now we know that if the prediction doesn't come to pass that they're a false prophet, what if it does happen? What if they predict something and it does happen?

Does that prove they're a prophet? Not necessarily. There's another step and that is, is their message leading you away from God? From the true God? That is to say, is their doctrine distancing you from the real God to go after some other phony God? That's what John seems to be concerned about in 1 John where he talks about testing the prophets or as he puts it, try the spirits.

Test the spirits of the prophets. In 1 John chapter 4 he says, Beloved, do not believe every spirit but test the spirits whether they are of God because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the spirit of God.

Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. Now, we won't concern ourselves right now with what he means by confessing that Jesus has come in the flesh. This no doubt is a reference to a specific heresy of the Gnostics who taught that Jesus was not literally physically incarnate.

But the main point of that passage is if they're saying the wrong things about Jesus, if they're preaching a Jesus that's different than the real Jesus, if they're heretics and leading you away from belief in the true Jesus, then they're false prophets. So a prophet can be seen to be false two ways at least. One is if they predict something and it doesn't happen and the other is whether they predict something or not and whether it happens or not.

If they are leading you away from the God of the Bible or from Jesus Christ, the true God, then they are a false prophet. The true prophet would never do that. Now, of the two, the ability to predict the future is the most striking proof that a person is inspired.

If his doctrine is right and he's also able to predict the future, then that's a pretty good couple of credentials and qualifications to give you reason to have confidence that that person is sent from God. And God himself indicates that the ability to tell the future is one of the things that makes his prophets evident in contrast to the prophets of false gods and false religions. Every false religion has their prophets, but the difference is that the true God alone is able to tell the future.

If you look over at Isaiah 41 for a moment verses 21 through 23, Isaiah is challenging the false gods and their prophets to tell the future. The false prophets are challenged pretty much to put up or shut up and prove what they're made of because Isaiah is a true prophet and he lived at a time when the Israelites were halting between two opinions, as they did in Elijah's day, and they were worshipping God, but they were also worshipping other gods. And so Isaiah, the prophet of the true God, kind of puts a challenge to the others.

And in Isaiah 41.21, he says, present your case, says Yahweh, bring forth your strong reason, says the king of Jacob, let them bring forth and show us what will happen. Let

them show the former things what they were that we may consider them and know the latter end of them, or declare for us things to come. Show the things which are to come hereafter that we may know that you are gods.

If you are a true God, you should know the future. And if you're prophesying from a true God, you should be able to tell us what the future holds, because that's what the true God does to prove that his prophets are real. And it's about the greatest thing God could do, because it has lasting value as proof for all generations.

You see, Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal and proved that Yahweh was real and that Elijah was a true prophet of God, because fire from heaven came down when he called on Yahweh and the prophets of Baal were unable to produce a similar demonstration. But the problem with that is none of us were there. Only a few people historically were there to see that.

And only those that were there can really be sure that it happened. Those who weren't there might well suspect that it's not true, that it's legendary and mythical. I don't suspect that it was, but obviously people who didn't see it have the luxury of doubting it.

But that's not the case with this kind of a test. If God has an inspired prophet and he predicts something, and we have the written prediction made centuries before the event, and then we also have the historical occurrence afterwards, we can compare the prediction with the occurrence and say, oh, well, obviously this was God. Obviously this prophet was inspired.

That's the kind of thing that lasts as a proof of inspiration forever. And the reason that the prophets that we have in the Bible are there is because the Jewish people, the children of the people who killed them, recognized that their predictions came true. Almost all the prophets were killed by their own countrymen, but later generations of those Jewish people recognized the fulfillment of the prophecies and the events that followed and said, hey, these guys really were from God and they preserved their writings.

And that's why their writings are in the Bible and the writings of other prophets are not, that didn't have that kind of credentials showing. So, the ability to predict the future is one of the great proofs of a true prophet and is the proof of all the prophets that are in our Old Testament. All the Old Testament books predict a lot of things.

Although I said they do more preaching than predicting and that's true. Much more of their material is spent preaching to people than predicting anything, yet their predictions are not a few. Somebody has said that at least a sixth of the material of the Bible is predictive prophecy.

That's actually the most conservative estimate. I've heard some say a third is, but that's

ridiculous. I've heard some say a fourth is.

So obviously there's no way to exactly quantify this, there's so many different opinions, but the most conservative estimate I've heard is that one sixth of the Bible is predictive prophecy. And if that's true, that's a lot of material. Like I have a Bible that has 1,200 pages.

If a sixth of it is predictive prophecy, that means if you took all the predictions that are scattered throughout the Bible and put them into one solid, concentrated section, that would be 200 pages of solid prediction. That's a lot of predicting going on. And the reasons the prophets of the Bible are there is because their predictions came true and they proved that they were from God.

So obviously you can be sure you're reading inspired stuff when you read them. I want to just address, before we move to the next major point, what is the reason for predictive prophecy? Well, I just suggested it. It is the proof that a prophet is really from God.

The purpose of predictive prophecy is not to kind of give us a heads up of what's happening in the future. A lot of Bible prophecy teachers today, especially those that focus on end times Bible prophecies, give the impression that God has given us sort of an outline of the future in the prophetic scriptures. So that we can sit down and make a chart and show you where everything is going to happen and what order and approximately when and so forth.

And that by these prophecies we can sort of outline the future before it happens. That's not really what you can do. As a matter of fact, most of the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled were not understood properly until after he fulfilled them.

And we read in Moses' statement in Deuteronomy 18, here's how you know if a prophet is from God or not. If he predicts something and it comes to pass, that could be from God. But if it doesn't confess, that's not from God.

But the very nature of that test means that you can't know if he's a prophet until the thing he predicted actually occurs or doesn't. And if you can't know he's a prophet until it actually happens, then there's no way you could have benefited from his prophecy in advance of the occurrence because you don't even know if he's a prophet or not until it happens. But by the time it happens, you don't need to read his prediction to find out if it's going to happen because it's happened before your eyes.

So you don't really have the advantage that some people claim from prophecy. That is, you can't go to the book of prophets and say, okay, I can tell you now what's going to happen in the future. Because almost all prophecies that have been fulfilled were not understood in advance of their fulfillment and they were only understood in retrospect.

After their fulfillment, it was understood, oh yeah, that was predicted that that would

happen. Let me show you something Jesus said in the Gospel of John about the purpose of God telling you things before they happen. In John 13, 19, in the upper room, Jesus said to his disciples, now I tell you before it comes, so that when it does come to pass, you will believe that I am he.

So that's why he predicted, I tell you about it before it happens, not so that you'll understand in advance what's going to happen, but so that when it actually happens, you'll remember I told you it would happen. And you'll believe who I am. You'll believe that I'm the one I said I am.

In chapter 14 of John, in verse 29, he said essentially the same thing. John 14, 29, and now I have told you before it comes that when it does come to pass, you may believe. So the purpose of predictive prophecy is so that when it is fulfilled, you'll remember that it was predicted and say, oh, okay, he really was from God after all.

Now the Old Testament prophets, their predictions, some of them were long-term predictions, which obviously their generation couldn't benefit from. The guys who prophesied things way out 500 years ahead of their time, obviously those predictions wouldn't help their generation. But all the prophets, or at least most of them, also predicted short-range things.

Jeremiah predicted that a man would die within a year, and he did. Isaiah predicted that the kings of Syria and Israel would be destroyed within three and a half years or so, three or four years of the time he predicted, and it happened in that time, and so forth. Almost all the prophets predicted things that did happen short-term, as well as predicting things that happened further out.

So the things that they predicted short-term proved to their generation that they were prophets, and gave reason for us to believe that the things that were much further out would also come to pass that they predicted. And of course, most of what prophets predicted in the Old Testament has already happened. In fact, I'm not sure that I could say that anything in the Old Testament prophets is as of now unfulfilled.

I realize that would be controversial. There are many things in the Old Testament prophets that some people think refer to the second coming of Christ, or to the millennium, or to something in the end times. I can just say this, not professing to be an expert by any means, but just as somebody who's taught through the prophets, verse by verse, sixteen times in sixteen years, I'm relatively familiar with what's in there, and I don't know of any passage that has not been fulfilled.

I don't know of any that remains to be fulfilled in the future. Now, like I said, it's a matter of interpretation sometimes, but we're going to talk about that interpretation tonight. Let me address first of all, why is it so difficult to understand the prophets? Well, for one thing, they're not writing historical narrative in most cases.

Now, the prophets do sometimes contain historical narrative. Jeremiah contains narrative about some of his trials that he went through. Isaiah tells some narrative about King Hezekiah's sickness, and the visitors from Babylon, and the time when Rabshika surrounded Jerusalem and the angel of the Lord destroyed 185,000 men in one night.

Those chapters, was it 36, 37, 38, 39 of Isaiah, are just that narrative. Daniel has six chapters that are just historical narrative, but for the most part, most of the prophetic material is not historical narrative. It's not like reading Genesis, or Samuel, or Kings, or Judges.

And furthermore, for the most part, the prophets are written in poetry almost entirely. If you do not have a King James version of the Bible, you can see this in your Bible at a glance. I say, if you don't have a King James, for the simple reason that the King James version does not set off poetry in a different type arrangement.

The King James just has every verse set off as a separate paragraph. In the modern translations, even the New King James, you can tell instantly at a glance the difference between a section that's poetic and a section that's not. Because the poetic sections, for example, if you turn to any psalm, you'll notice that the text is not set up like regular paragraphs.

There's indentions of lines and so forth that you wouldn't do if you were writing a paragraph. It's set up like poetry. That's what the translators have done so that you'll recognize poetry when you find it in the Old Testament.

Now, if you look through the prophets, just leaf through them. Look through Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, any of the mighty prophets. For the most part, it's almost all poetry.

Of course, it's prophecy. It's almost all poetry. Very little of it is set off in regular prosaic paragraphs.

And because the prophets wrote in poetry, it means that in addition to being inspired men, they were literary men. They were creative men. They used poetry as the medium for communication.

Just like someone might think of maybe music and song today would be one way to communicate a message to the church or something. Well, poetry, Hebrew poetry, is what the Old Testament prophets wrote in almost all the time. But it's one of the features of poetry, of course, that's not literal for the most part.

Even poetry of any culture uses figures of speech that you wouldn't use all the time in ordinary speech. It's just the way poetry is. It's not quite as literal.

A lot more imagery, a lot more symbolic language. And the prophets refer to events in history that are not well known to us. Some of the events they refer to are not recorded

as historical events as they are in the scripture.

For example, when you read about in some of the prophets about what was going to happen to Edom or Moab or Ammon, we don't have any historical information about some of that stuff. The Bible writers didn't record the fulfillments of those prophecies. They only record the predictions.

And they're predicted in poetry. It's hard to know how much is literal and how much is not literal. This makes it difficult, of course, more difficult than reading some other parts of the Bible to know what's going on.

A lot of times we have no idea what happened afterwards that was the fulfillment of those prophecies. We also have, in complicating the matter, in the Old Testament prophets, apocalyptic visions and imagery. Now in your notes, I've given a lot of reference here.

I'm not turning those references now simply because we won't have the time in the time I've allotted for these lectures. But if you want to look up the examples, I've given usually several examples of each of these phenomena in the notes. But apocalyptic language and imagery is the kind of stuff you find in the visions of Daniel or the visions of Zechariah, or for that matter, the visions of the book of Revelation, that you have scenes depicting some kind of reality, but it's in symbolic form.

You've got angels and beasts and dragons and things like that, which represent stuff. And they're not really just like watching an ordinary movie that is really just telling a story in a straightforward way. It's more like a symbolic drama.

And a lot of the prophets use this apocalyptic imagery. And a lot of the words and the images they use are for effect. And they're impressionistic.

They're saying, you'll find references to the sun and the moon turning dark and the stars falling from the sky and all the mountains being moved and the islands disappearing and the mountains melt like wax. These kinds of images, very dramatic things. If literal, they must be talking about the end of the world.

But of course, they're not in most cases talking about the end of the world in these passages. They're really just using apocalyptic imagery, a very common phenomenon in the prophets. And that makes it difficult for the average reader who doesn't, in modern English literature, we don't generally do that.

And so we're reading ancient literature written by people who are products of and writing to a very ancient and foreign culture to us. And that does make it more difficult for us. There's also another phenomenon, and that is the use of typology or the recognition that some events are a type of others.

And the Exodus is a particularly frequently used example. When God took the children of Israel out of Egypt, this became an image that the prophets and the Psalms used a lot to refer back to, even to refer to future things. When the Old Testament prophets predicted what Jesus would do, they often compared it to the Exodus.

The salvation of God's remnant in the days of Messiah is likened to God saving his people of Israel out of Egypt. And the New Testament writers pick up the same image. Paul says, Christ, our Passover, is slain for us, meaning that Christ's death saves us as the death of the Passover lamb functioned to help get the children of Israel out of Egypt.

Or Paul in 1 Corinthians 10 talks about the adventures of the children of Israel coming out of Egypt through the water and being baptized in the sea and following Moses as a type or a shadow of us. But the prophets use the imagery of the Exodus quite a bit. And another similar event that is even less familiar to most Christians is the return of the exiles from Babylon.

Most of the prophets said something about this. The Exodus was carried away of the Jewish nation into Babylon in 586 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar was a very important disaster in the history of Israel. The temple was destroyed for the first time there.

The temple has only been destroyed twice. Once was in 586 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar. The other was in A.D. 70 by Titus and the Romans.

Both of those were extremely unusual disasters for Israel. In the case of 586 B.C., when the Babylonians carried them away, it was only a temporary disaster. It only lasted for about 70 years.

Then the remnant came back. The disaster in A.D. 70 has never been remedied. It's more of a permanent problem.

But the exile into Babylon in the Old Testament is the subject and the concern and the burden of many of the prophets. But none of them mentions it without mentioning that God will also bring his people back. But what I want to point out to you about that is that just as God bringing his people out of Egypt in the Exodus is picked up as a type of the salvation that the Messiah will bring, so also the similar gathering of the people of Israel out of Babylon to bring them back to Jerusalem, sort of a secondary Exodus.

The other time the Jews were in bondage in a foreign land and they were, by the grace of God, allowed to escape and come back to the promised land. The Exodus from Egypt and the return of the exiles from Babylon are in principle the same kind of a thing. Both are cases of God saving his people from bondage and bringing them to the promised land.

And both of them serve in the prophets as a type and a shadow of the Messianic salvation that Christ brought at the cross. So that this is one of the things that makes the prophets most confusing, is that you'll be reading about God bringing the exiles back

from Babylon, and all of a sudden the passage is talking about Jesus. And it's talking about things that the New Testament writers associate with the New Covenant.

And you'll think, wait a minute, that didn't happen when the Jews came back from Babylon. And what's really going on there is that it's like it's a merging of the Messianic age in the vision of the prophet with the return of the exiles from Babylon, because one is a type and a shadow of the other. Just as God bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt was a type of Christ, so bringing the people back from Babylon is a type.

And you'll read even much more of this in the prophets. You're going to be talking about God gathering the exiles back and the redeemed are going to come to Zion with songs of joy in their heads and so forth. And then the language is going to not be talking about the exiles who came back from Babylon.

It's going to suddenly be talking about people who are saved through Jesus. And it's going to be passages that are Messianic. And we know this because so many of them are quoted in the New Testament and applied that way.

And that's where it gets confusing because sometimes the imagery of the exile is blended, or I should say the return from the exile is blended with the imagery of the Messianic age. This is also true not in the book of the prophets but in one of the historical books where a prophet is speaking, Nathan the prophet, speaking to David in 2 Samuel chapter 7 when he told David that God did not want David to build a temple but that God would raise up a son of David after David was dead who would build a house unto the name of the Lord and God would establish his kingdom forever. Well this passage seems to be fulfilled in Solomon, but the New Testament writers, Hebrews for example, Hebrews 1.5 quotes from that passage and says that's talking about Jesus.

Now Solomon is a type of Jesus. But as you read the prophet's statements, Nathan's statements there, it's in 2 Samuel 7 verse 12 and so, some of the prophecy sounds like it's about Solomon and some of it sounds like it's about Jesus. And some of it clearly could be about both.

And this is what happened to the prophets. Jesus is the main subject of the prophets. Jesus said in the volume of the book it is written of me.

It says in the 24th chapter of Luke that as Jesus walked on the road to Emmaus with those two men after his resurrection, he expounded to them all the things in the law and the prophets that were about him. And there is apparently a lot. And Jesus is the focal message of the New Testament.

But he is introduced kind of subtly in the context where something else seems like it's being discussed. In particular, the return of exiles from Babylon. When that's discussed, it's generally speaking the prophets cannot resist but to leap forward and talk about the

salvation by the Messiah.

Of which these earlier deliverances from Egypt and Babylon are mere types. And they are sort of examples of the phenomenon of God saving his people. But the ultimate salvation is going to come through the Messiah.

And this is something that once you become acquainted with this, it makes a lot of passages a whole lot easier. Otherwise you're going to say, wait a minute, I thought we were just talking about the exiles. Now it sounds like this passage is about Jesus.

Well, you're right. It is. But it's not.

It's about the exiles. And they'll go back and forth. Sometimes the passage blends both eras in the passage.

There's also the phenomenon of spiritualized usage. Now, this is controversial. Because, now this is an area where dispensations would differ from someone like myself.

Because dispensations would say, no, you need to take the prophets literally. And if you spiritualize them, you're doing something rather naughty. Because Israel always has to be Israel and Jerusalem always has to be Jerusalem.

And a person like myself, following basically the trend of all the church until 1830, the church fathers, the medieval church and the reformers all agreed with the apostles on this. That many times in the Old Testament, Israel and Jerusalem and Zion are terms that don't refer to the literal Israel or the literal Jerusalem or the literal Mount Zion. But actually are references to the church.

In Isaiah 28, 16 where it says, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation of stone, a precious cornerstone. We know very well that's talking about Jesus. Because the New Testament quotes that verse many times about Jesus.

He's the cornerstone. He's the foundation. But where is that? In Zion.

Well, Zion, literal Zion is like Mount Zion where Jerusalem is. But Jesus isn't the foundation of that. He's the foundation of the church.

The church is that Zion. When it says in Isaiah chapter 2 or Micah chapter 4 that it should come to pass in the last days, saith the Lord, that the mountain of the Lord's house will be exalted above all the hills and that all the nations, the Gentiles will flow into it. And they'll say, let us go to the house of the God of Jacob and he will teach us his ways and we'll learn and walk in them.

This, I believe, is a reference to the church age. The church is the Zion that is there elevated and the Gentiles coming in to learn the ways of God speaks of the church's mission of discipling the nations and teaching them to observe all things that Jesus

commanded. And then walking in it.

But that is of course spiritualizing it. You can either take it literally, which would say, okay, someday Mount Zion is going to be the biggest mountain in the whole world. It's going to be bigger than Mount Everest because it's going to be exalted above all the mountains and all the hills.

And it's going to be quite a climb, but everyone's going to climb it. All the Gentiles are going to climb up there and they're going to learn from the Levites, I guess, the law of Moses and walk in God's Old Testament ways. Well, you can take it that way if you want to, but that's not the way I think the New Testament writers understood those things.

Most of the time the New Testament writers took passages like that and they gave them a spiritual application. I'm going to show you that by use of the chart that's on the back of your notes in a moment, not now. We'll come back to that after we take a break in a moment.

So what I'm going to say is that there are a number of times, a lot of times in the prophets, where the actual meaning is spiritual. Though you wouldn't necessarily know it if you didn't have the help of the New Testament writers to clarify that, because you might be inclined to take it literally instead. There's also in the Old Testament prophets, as well as everywhere in the Bible, a lot of use of hyperbole.

We're talking about all flesh will experience this or no flesh will experience that and all people will have this and from one end of the world to the other, the land will be filled with dead bodies and so forth. It talks as if there's a universal, every last human being is affected by this. And yet, the same passages will mention the remnant of whom that isn't the case.

A hyperbole is an exaggerated expression for the purpose of giving an impression, not for the purpose of deception. When we think of exaggerating, we might think of the typical stereotype of a fish story. The guy talking about the size of that fish that got away and he's always exaggerating.

Well, that's deceptive. At least we think of it as deceptive. He's not being completely honest.

But a hyperbole is not intended to be deceptive. A hyperbole is known to be inaccurate. It's known to be not exact.

It's not supposed to be a statement of exactitude. It's intended to give an impression. It's for emphatic purposes that the exaggeration is used.

And that's how it is in Scripture all the time. And we know sometimes when these are being used because you'll read something that sounds like it's universal and then lo and

behold, you're going to read about the remnant that that doesn't apply to. I mean, even in the New Testament you have that.

The Old Testament writers have it as well. I've given some examples in your notes. I won't turn to all of them.

But a really obvious one in the New Testament is in John chapter 3. If I can find this. Here. John 3 verses 32 and 33.

John 3 verses 32 and 33. John 3 verses 32 and 33. This is by no means a unique case in the Scripture.

But in John 3, excuse me, verse 32, it says, And what he has seen and heard, that he testifies. And no one receives his testimony. Now that sounds pretty absolute.

No one receives Christ's testimony. But then it says, He who has received his testimony has certified that God is true. I thought you just said no one receives his testimony.

Well, I did say that. But then you said those who have received his testimony have certified that God is true. Well, I said that too.

Well, how can both those things be true? Because the first is a hyperbole. In saying no one receives his testimony, it means few do. I mean, the Pharisees at one point said, The whole world has gone after Jesus.

Remember that statement in chapter 11 of John? The whole world has gone after him. Well, that's not exactly true. I mean, not even all of Israel was going after him, much less the whole world.

But that's hyperbole. And it's common figure of speech. It's not considered to be dishonest.

It's not considered to be misleading. It's just there to give an impression of emphasis on what they're trying to say. And you'll find that in the prophets.

And if you take it in an absolute sense when it's not meant that way, you can certainly get the wrong impression. One of the other things that makes the prophets difficult at times is their little acted-out parables. Most of the prophets had to not only speak the word of God, but also do something to illustrate it from time to time.

Isaiah, for example, was told to go into a prophetess and have a baby with her. I presume they got married, but the main important thing was the name of their baby. The name of the baby was Meher-shelel-hash-baz, which means swift to the kill and hasty to the plunder, or something like that.

And the name of the child was the significant thing there. Having a baby and giving it

this name was part of the message. His existence then was like a visual reminder of the message, because his name was that way.

I guess in God causing Abram and Sarah to name their child Isaac, which means laughter, was another thing to remind them that they'd laughed when he promised that they'd have a baby. But Isaiah also, in a much more strange kind of situation, I guess it's more strange, in Isaiah chapter 22, he was told to walk away naked with his buttocks exposed for three years in public to represent what was going to happen to the Egyptians when the Assyrians would carry them away into captivity. Now the prophets, they had to be kind of, it cost something to be a prophet.

Ezekiel's wife died the same day that Jerusalem was besieged and God said, don't weep, because Jerusalem is going to go unmourned. And Jerusalem is like my wife and she's died and I don't want you to weep for your wife. So here the guy loses his wife, he's not even allowed to show any signs of mourning for her.

And the Bible indicates that he and his wife had an affectionate relationship. Obviously it would be very hard not to mourn. Jeremiah was told not to marry at all, which was part of his message.

And Hosea was told to marry a woman who was a harlot, which was to illustrate his message. Jeremiah put an ox yoke over his neck, which was intended to suggest that God's going to bring the yoke of Babylon upon the people of Israel. And he walked around with this yoke on him.

These are acted out parables. The king of the acted out parables was Ezekiel. He acted out probably at least half a dozen or more, maybe ten, I don't know, different parables.

And he did real strange things, enough so that people who don't have a very high respect for the Bible sometimes think he was schizophrenic or had mental illness or something. He did real strange things. Lay on one side for 39 days and lay on the other side for whatever length of time it was.

And all of these acted out parables are strange, but that's the purpose of them. They have to be strange because only strange things really arrest the attention of everybody. If you do something very normal, people are going to walk by the street and not pay attention.

If you do something really weird, everyone is going to stop and say, what? Did you see what I saw? Did you see that prophet walking around with his buttocks hanging out? That's weird. What's that about? And that, of course, when the prophet would then say, well, this is what that's about, you know, he's caught them at a curious moment, a teachable moment, you know. And that's really, I think, what the acted parables were for.

A picture is worth a thousand words. You can easily forget a sermon, but you can't forget a guy's buttocks hanging out when he walks down the street preaching. I mean, that might sound rude, but I didn't make it up.

It's in the Bible, you know. The stranger the action, the more memorable, the more arresting and so forth. But it is definitely very strange and sometimes makes the prophets seem very bizarre to us.

They seem very foreign to us. Well, they are foreign. They were Hebrews living 3,000 years ago.

So, that's one of the things that makes them hard to understand. Now, what I want to do, I'm going to take a break now, just for a few minutes, let you stretch, and we're going to come back for another hour, and then we'll be done. And I want to talk about how to understand the prophets.

I've mainly just outlined why some of the things are difficult to understand. I have on your notes some things that will help you to know how to understand them better. And the chart that's on the back of your notes, I really want to spend a little time looking at with you, because it will be helpful to you in interpreting some things of the prophets, I believe.

So, if you'd pause a moment with me and stretch.