THE FOUR MAJOR PROPHETS

ISAIAH, JEREMIAH, EZEKIEL AND DANIEL

Facts about the prophets
As the poetical books belong to the Golden Age of the nation of Israel, the Prophetical books are written for the dark ages of these chosen people.

The Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all the prophets...saying, Turn ye from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes which I commanded your fathers and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. [2 Kings 17:13]

The period of all the prophets (4 Major and 12 minor) is approx. 500 years (1000 – 500 BC)
Written to: Israel (10 northern tribes) and Judah (2 southern tribes.)

Main subjects:
1. Israel’s sin: idolatry, disobedience and immorality
2. judgment: Israel overcome by the Assyrians
   Judah overcome by the Babylonians
3. the scattering of the Jews among all the nations
4. the coming of Messiah
5. The Millennial reign of Messiah
None of the prophets foresaw the Church Age.

Applications for today:
The prophets spoke at a certain time to a certain people - yet we find abiding principles for today as well as clear glimpses into the mind and heart of God: his purpose, his plan, and his power to carry them out.

Many powerful and often beautiful passages become anchors for our minds and hearts in enduring our own trials and uncertainties.

Fulfilled prophecies abound – the Word of God abides forever! “my word shall not return to me void, but shall accomplish that for which I sent it. [Isaiah 55:11]

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Isaiah preaches to Judah during the time Israel is overcome by the Assyrians. It is 120 years until Judah’s captivity in Babylon. Jeremiah prophesied before and during the fall of Jerusalem. Ezekiel and Daniel minister to the people during the captivity of Judah in Babylon.

ISAIAH: The Prince of Prophets
Isaiah, son of Amoz, ministered under 4 kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah for a period of about 40 years.

Isaiah stands at the peak of the O.T. as the literary genius of the prophets. His book is the longest and looks farthest into the future, with amazing prophecies of the Messiah, Emmanuel, and his role as the Suffering Servant of Jehovah. He is thought by some scholars to be the most notable figure, after David, in the history of Israel due to his role of a powerful statesman and guide to King Hezekiah and the nation before the Assyrian invasion.
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Many think it was due to Isaiah that Judah’s judgment was delayed another 120 years. The beauty of Isaiah’s writings are described as “full of grandeur and dignity, with energy and a profusion of imagery.” Example: read Isaiah 6:1-8, Isaiah’s vision and his call.

Two major divisions:
1—39 • Christ our coming Redeemer

41—66 • Christ our Savior (the Book of Consolation)
   Passages: 45:5-13, 23; 51:12-16; 53– the Suffering Servant (this chapter is known as the “jewel of Isaiah”); 61:1-3 and 65:17-25 (Millennial Kingdom); 66 (2nd Coming)

By “coincidence” Isaiah is a miniature Bible in its structure. Both Isaiah and the Bible have 2 parts of 27 and 39 chapters each. Both Isaiah and the O.T. open with God’s case against man. Isaiah closes with prophecy of coming King and his Kingdom, while the Bible ends with the Revelation of that Kingdom. 2nd sections of both are concerned with the person and works of Jesus Christ.

JEREMIAH: The Weeping Prophet

Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah, a priest, called by God to minister to a seemingly hopeless people of Judah. [1:4-10] He prophesied for more than 40 years. The northern tribes were already in captivity in Assyria, and Judah was in decline. When Judah finally falls to Babylon, Jeremiah ministers to the remnant remaining, then is himself taken into captivity.

It is impossible to read this book chronologically. God instructed him to write his messages on a scroll, and he did so through his scribe, Baruch. The messages were written as they came to his mind, not in their order.

God gives Jeremiah many symbols to use in teaching the people: like a rotted girdle, a yoke on his neck like an ox, a drought, 2 baskets of figs [24:--1-10] (all interpreted in the text.) Twelve Object lessons are also used, such as a boiling caldron, the full bottle, the potter’s vessel [18:1-6], the broken bottle, the hidden stones etc. He uses the words behold, the day’s come... 14 times, giving a message of hope for the future.
(Chapter 31 the New Covenant – the great centerpiece of the book)

Jeremiah is deeply sorrowful as he watches Judah forsake their love relationship with God with willful impenitence and disregard of his messages. Their overthrow occurs in Ch. 52. The book has an autobiographical nature, with Jeremiah’s sensitive and dedicated character revealed in many confessions and lamentations. Examples: 10:23-24; 12:1-3; 15:10; 17:14-18; 20:7-9, 15-18
LAMENTATIONS

This is an exquisite book of poetry, attributed to Jeremiah. There are 5 distinct poems or laments— not all sorrowful, but mostly. The prophet is weeping over the people’s sins and the fall of Jerusalem. The sun shines brilliantly though, in 3:22-26 — or, as one scholar says, it is “a beautiful rainbow over a murky sky.”

*It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.*

EZEKIEL: God’s Watchman

Ezekiel was a priest and a contemporary of Jeremiah, but little is known of his background. He was taken captive to Babylon in their second invasion around 597 BC. Some captives were made slaves, some imprisoned and some allowed to settle in colonies. Ezekiel was among the later, and began a ministry to the captives lasting at least 27 years.

Recurrent themes in Ezekiel’s writing emphasize the character of God: his holiness, his “otherness” and majesty. He is known as the prophet of visions, *the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God...* [1:1] Chapters 40 – 48 include the awesome visions of the New Millennial Temple.

A second theme emphasizes the sinfulness of Israel (idolatry, animal, nature and sun worship – a series of visions is shown to Ezekiel concerning past and present abominations.

The third theme, the fact of imminent judgment: *I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it – my words shall be prolonged no more...* [12:28]

Individual responsibility is the fourth theme – Salvation always possible. Ezekiel is appointed a “watchman” that the wicked may turn and save his life. [3:16-21] God told Ezekiel:

*Go through the streets in the midst of Jerusalem, and mark the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry out against the abominations that are done there...* [9:4] I will leave a remnant... when ye shall be scattered through the countries... they shall remember me among the nations where they shall be carried captives. [6:8-9]

The fifth and last theme is the promise of future restoration. “Dry bones” will live again [37:5] No more division between Israel and Judah [37:17]. The blessings of the Covenant will be present [37:23, 27]. And Messiah will sit on David’s throne [37:24; 47:1-12]. A New Temple [40 - 48]
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DANIEL: The Prophet of Dreams

Daniel was taken captive to Babylon 9 years before Ezekiel, and while Ezekiel worked among the Jewish slaves and settlers, Daniel was chosen to play an important part in the palace and government life. . . . in whom was no blemish, but well favored and skillful in all wisdom, cunning in knowledge and understanding science ... [1:4]

Daniel stands in God’s word as the man who dared to keep a clean heart and body [1:8] God revealed secrets to Daniel in dreams and visions. He looks far into the future, like Ezekiel, and he is quoted often in the Book of Revelation, and is necessary even, to understanding Revelation.

Two sections of Daniel:

I. Historical and narration [Chapters 1 – 6]
   A. The reign of Nebuchadnezzar
      1. Daniel interprets the king’s dreams [2] (Read his beautiful prayer - [2:20-23])
      2. Daniel and 3 friends are Cast in the fiery furnace [3]
      3. Nebuchadnezzar’s tree dream and his insanity [4]
   B. Reign of Belshazzar [5]
      1. Daniel interprets the hand-writing on the wall
      2. Medo-Persia conquers Babylon
   C. Reign of Darius the Mede [6]
      1. Conspiracy against Daniel
      2. Daniel preserved in the den of lions.

II. Prophetic Section [Chapters 7 – 12]
   A. Vision and interpretation of the 4 beasts [7]
   B. Vision of the Ram and He Goat – interpreted to him by Gabriel [8]
   C. Seventy Weeks Prophecy, following Daniel’s prayer
      1. Of repentance for himself and the people – Gabriel
      2. Again sent [9]
   D. Israel’s future foretold – including the Maccabees, Syrian and Egyptian relations, Antiochus Epiphanes and the career of Antichrist foretold. [11]
   F. Final Revelation – The Great Tribulation and the resurrection [12:1-3]
      Daniel is told: close up the book and wait. [12:4-13]