The background of the cover is a detailed painting of hands holding and pointing to scrolls. The scene is set in a warm, golden-brown light, with a blue cloth visible on the left side. The hands are rendered with fine detail, showing the texture of the skin and the folds of the fabric.

5

Seeing Jesus
IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

.....
A 10-WEEK BIBLE STUDY

The Word of the Lord

*Seeing Jesus in
the Prophets*

nancy guthrie

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The Son of David: Seeing Jesus in the Historical Books

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The Word of the Lord: Seeing Jesus in the Prophets

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Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Cover image: The Bridgeman Art Library

First printing 2014

Printed in the United States of America

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Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-3660-1

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-3663-2

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-3661-8

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-3662-5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Guthrie, Nancy.

The word of the Lord : seeing Jesus in the prophets /

Nancy Guthrie.

pages cm.— (Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament series)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-4335-3660-1 (tp)

1. Bible. Prophets—Textbooks. 2. Bible. Prophets—Criticism, interpretation, etc. 3. Jesus Christ—Biblical teaching. I. Title.

BS1506.G88 2014

224'.064—dc23

2013044994

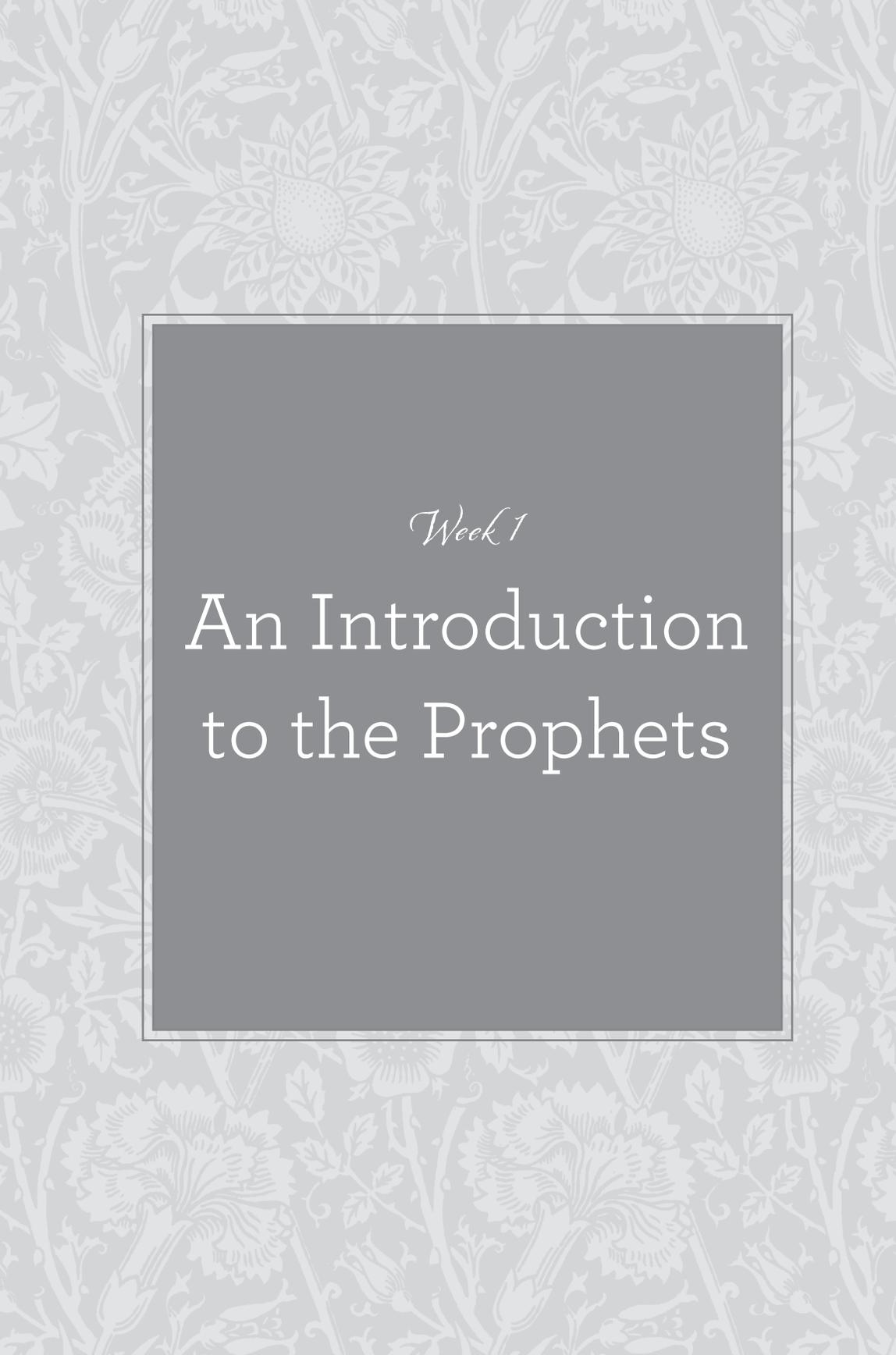
Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

VP 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Week 1

An Introduction
to the Prophets

Teaching Chapter

The Word of the Lord

Do you, right now, have a smartphone within your grasp? Have you checked to see if you've had a message in the last fifteen minutes? If you're like me, you can hardly stand to see that red light blinking and not look to see what the message is. Maybe you've read or heard some of these self-tests to see if you are developing an unhealthy addiction to your device:

☞ If you're driving around town and discover that you forgot your phone, do you find yourself becoming very unsettled about what messages you may be missing?

☞ Have you ever almost rear-ended someone or run off the road because you were trying to read a text or type one?

☞ Have you ever completed a transaction at a store without once speaking to the person waiting on you because you were talking on your phone?

☞ Have you put your phone on vibrate at the movie theater or at church rather than turn it off, even though you're not expecting anything important?

☞ Have you developed a habit of checking your phone every few minutes whether or not you've heard a tone or seen a flashing light, just in case you've missed something?

☞ Do you find that you feel a surge of significance when you get a message and a tinge of disappointment when there are no new messages?

And here's the real kicker:

☞ Have you ever answered your phone while in the bathroom and had to delay flushing so you would not give yourself away?

Is it not embarrassing to think about how desperate we are to make sure we don't miss any messages? Someone out there—anyone out there—may have something to tell us, and we simply must know now. Sometimes our desperation to read a message is almost as if it were a message straight from God himself.

And then we realize—God has sent us a message, the most important message we will ever receive. The Bible, though written by human authors, is God speaking. And what is most amazing about the Bible is that it is not just a record of what God has said in the past. When we read the Bible, it is God actively speaking to us right now. The book of Hebrews begins with these words:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, *God spoke* . . . (Heb. 1:1)

I have to stop right there so that we can think about what this means: *God spoke*. Perhaps this has been drained of wonder for us. God—the God whose word has the power to call planets and plants and people into existence, who from eternity past has existed in unfathomable splendor—has condescended to distill his thundering voice into human language. This God has sent us a message about how life in his world works and why it doesn't always work well and what he has done and will do about it.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers *by the prophets*. (Heb. 1:1)

Who were the prophets? The first prophet was Moses. Before Moses, God communicated directly with the heads of individual families by visions and dreams or by appearing to them and speaking. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph all received these kinds of personal revelations. Rather than having another person bring them the word of God, the Lord himself spoke directly to them in a variety of ways. But by Moses's day, the twelve sons of Jacob had bur-

geoned into a populace of six hundred thousand heads of families. How would God speak to this huge crowd of people? Through Moses, God began to speak to the nation through a spokesperson known as a prophet.

After Moses, God spoke through a number of other prophets. After Moses, the one who really catches our attention is Samuel. He prophesied during the time of the judges. Samuel as God's prophet anointed the first king of Israel, Saul, and then the great king of Israel, David. And, really, the rise or expansion of the number of prophets in Israel coincides with the rise of the monarchy in Israel.

We tend to think of Israel's kings through the lens of other kingdoms in history—as having absolute power. But that is not how it was supposed to work in ancient Israel. The prophet was the one who anointed and installed the king. The prophet was to stand in the counsel of God and then give direction to the king from God. Much of what the prophets said in their day to the king and to the people is written down in the Prophetic Books of the Old Testament—books that go by the prophet's name, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jonah, Hosea, and Micah. Over one hundred times in the Historical and Prophetic Books of the Old Testament we read that “the word of the LORD came” to a prophet. The prophets did not communicate their own ideas or agendas. They were called by God to be spokesmen for God.

And, amazingly, though the books by the prophets were God's message to his people in their day, they are no less God's message for you and me today. But can we be honest about the Prophetic Books? Aren't they, in some ways, the most difficult part of the Bible to grasp? Aren't they the books of the Bible that most of us know the least about? If I asked you to give me a sentence describing what *Lord of the Flies* or *The Scarlet Letter* or *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is about, I imagine you'd be able to tell me. But, if you're like me, you'd probably have a harder time describing what the books of Micah or Ezekiel or Malachi are about, wouldn't you? Many of us would say that the Bible is the most important book in our lives, and yet there are parts of it we've been content to not really know about. But we want that to change. So, perhaps we should just deal up front with the problems we are going

to have to overcome if we want to hear God speaking to us through the Old Testament Prophetic Books.

The Problems with the Prophets We Must Overcome

What is it that makes the Old Testament Prophetic Books difficult to read and understand?

First, *we're unfamiliar with the history and geography*. If you or I were reading something that had references to the Depression or 9/11 or to the Rockies or the Big Apple, we would have no trouble understanding these references because they entail history and geography we are familiar with. But when we read that Isaiah sees a warrior coming from Edom in crimson garments, we don't get what this means because we don't know that Edom represents the enemies of God and of God's people throughout the Old Testament. When Amos talks about the "cows of Bashan" (Amos 4:1), we don't laugh out loud as we should. We don't immediately get that those "cows" were rich, lazy women who didn't care about the poor, because we're unfamiliar with the sociopolitical landscape of his day.

Likewise, because most of us lack a basic mental picture of the geography of countries and cities of the ancient Middle East, these geographical references don't immediately register. You may not have spent a lot of time looking at the maps at the end of your Bible. But a little time spent with the maps will be a great help to you in grasping what is being said in the Prophetic Books. To help you with this, a map that shows the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah (p. 21) and a wider map that shows Assyria and Babylonia in relation to Israel and Judah (p. 164) have been included in this book.

I grew up going to Sunday school, learning all the stories of the Old Testament. But as grateful as I am for this background, somehow I never really grasped how those stories fit together. My knowledge of the history of the Old Testament was a mishmash of kings and kingdoms and battles and exiles that I made little sense of for most of my life. Maybe you have had the same experience. So let's take a minute to nail down the most basic history we need to grasp to make sense of the Prophetic Books—and, really, the whole of the story of the people of God.

The Divided Kingdoms of Israel and Judah



Remember that the Israelites came into the land as twelve tribes and eventually were given a king. There was Saul, then David, and then Solomon. After King Solomon died, the kingdom of Israel split into two kingdoms. The ten tribes in the north were called “Israel” and are sometimes referred to as “Samaria,” which was the name of their capital. And the two tribes in the south—Judah and Benjamin—were called “Judah” and are sometimes referred to as “Jerusalem,” which was their capital. Eventually the northern kingdom was conquered by Assyria and taken into exile and never really returned but was essentially folded into other people groups. Two hundred years later, the southern kingdom, Judah, was taken into exile in Babylon, and eventually a small remnant of those exiles from Judah returned to the land and were then known as “Jews.”

Some of the prophets prophesied during the days before the northern kingdom was taken into exile. We’ll start next week with Jonah, who prophesied to the northern kingdom. There are also prophets who prophesied in the southern kingdom before and after the northern kingdom went into exile. Those prophets constantly called Judah to look at what had happened in the northern kingdom to avoid the same experience. But they didn’t. So we also have prophets who prophesied to the people of Judah living in exile in Babylon and a couple who prophesied to those who eventually returned to Jerusalem.

But this brings up another obstacle we have to overcome to study the Prophetic Books. You and I tend to prefer reading our history from beginning to end, in chronological order. So we might expect that the Prophetic Books that appear earlier in our Bibles were written first. But the Prophetic Books are not placed in our Bibles in chronological order, and the material within the books is not always presented in chronological order. These books were written by ancient Eastern writers who organized material differently than we do.

If you will open up your Bible to the contents page, you’ll see that in the Old Testament we have the five books of Moses, from Genesis through Deuteronomy; then the Historical Books, from Joshua through Esther; and then the Wisdom Books, from Job through Song of Solomon. Following those books, we have the Major and the Minor Prophets, from

Isaiah through Malachi. We might assume that everything we read about from Isaiah through Malachi happened after what we read about in the preceding books. But in reality we can lay the content of the prophets over the content of 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah in terms of dating. The prophets prophesied at the time of the events described in the Historical Books.

We might also assume that because Isaiah is the first of the Prophetic Books, he was the first prophet to write his book. But he wasn't. The book of Isaiah is first because it is the longest. The next book, Jeremiah, is the next longest book. The Major Prophets are major because they are longer, and the Minor Prophets are minor not because they are less important, but because they are shorter.

Because we want to grasp the historical setting these books were written in so that we can better understand their message, we're going to go in chronological order instead of biblical order. We won't be able to explore each of the sixteen Prophetic Books, but we'll cover nine of them over the course of our study.

So our unfamiliarity with ancient geography and history as well as our love for chronology makes understanding the Prophetic Books a challenge, but hopefully we're already getting a better grasp of that. A second reason we struggle to understand the Prophetic Books is that *we're easily bored or confused by their repetitive oracles*. As we work our way through the Prophetic Books, we'll see that some of them tell us a story—such as that of the prophet Jonah and that of Daniel and his friends. But much of the content in the Prophetic Books is made up of oracles. Some of the oracles are like sermons or extended poems. Others are in the form of a dialogue between the prophet and God or a description of a visionary experience given to the prophet by God. Many of the Prophetic Books are collections of oracles of a particular prophet, selected from a lifetime of prophetic ministry—kind of like a “greatest hits” album by your favorite recording artist. It can be difficult to know where one oracle ends and another begins, and the content of the oracles can seem repetitive. But recognizing and identifying these repeated elements will actually help us. There are really only three major themes, and they are reiterated throughout the Prophetic Books: sin, judgment, and hope.

The prophets weren't really telling the king and the people to do anything new. Instead, they were like prosecutors in our legal system, charging the people with crimes against God's law, the Ten Commandments. We're going to find that the prophets repeatedly pointed out the ways God's people were not obeying the commandments that had been given long before through Moses. The prophets reiterated the same promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience that Moses had revealed back in Deuteronomy. The prophets confronted God's people about having other gods before Yahweh, bowing down to graven images, taking the Lord's name in vain, and treating the Sabbath like any other day. The prophets indicted God's people for dishonoring their parents and for murder, adultery, theft, lying, and coveting.

But the prophets were after more than just rigid obedience to the law. They called God's people to love the Lord, which is and always has been the heart of real obedience to God's law. They point out all the things that the people loved in place of God, including: bribes (Isa. 1:23), sleep (Isa. 56:10), foreign gods (Jer. 2:25), lies (Jer. 5:31), playing the prostitute (Ezek. 23:14, 17), sacred raisin cakes of other gods (Hos. 3:1), shameful ways (Hos. 4:18), bringing offerings to centers of false worship (Amos 4:4–5), and evil (Mic. 3:2). The only cure for this wholehearted departure into sin lay in their return to an all-consuming love for the Lord.¹ That's what the prophets called them to.

A third thing that makes the Prophetic Books challenging is that *we have a misunderstanding about what prophecy is*. We tend to think of a prophet as someone who predicts the future, much like a fortune-teller or psychic. And it is true that there was an element of prediction in the Old Testament prophets' job and message. They spoke of coming judgment, the exile, and the future restoration of a faithful remnant to the land. But the prophets did not make their predictions primarily to inform the people of their day about the future; rather, the predictions were meant to encourage the people of God to form the future.² Their predictions were often conditional, intended to act as incentives toward repentance and obedience.

These are some of the things that make the Prophetic Books challenging to grasp, and you might think of others. So what makes them

worth our investment over the weeks to come? I want to suggest several reasons we should lean in to listen to the message God gave to his people through his prophets.

The Message of the Prophets We Must Hear

The first reason we need to study the Prophetic Books is that *we struggle with the same sins they struggled with*: idolatry, disregard for God's law, empty religiosity, being in love with the world, hard-heartedness, greed, lack of concern for the poor, and presumption as members of the covenant community. If you read that list and really don't see your own sin in it, that doesn't mean this study isn't for you. In fact, it might mean that this study is even more important for you. We are so very practiced in denying our sinfulness. We rationalize and minimize and relabel our sins so that they don't even come up on our radar. Maybe you and I need to hear repeatedly about the sins that break the heart of God so that conviction will penetrate our well-rehearsed denials. Maybe, as Israel's and Judah's sins were exposed so that they might come to repentance, our sins will be exposed so that we will come to repentance.

So, first, we struggle with the same sins they struggled with, and second, *we are subject to the same judgment*. God's judgment on his people in the time of the prophets meant that they lost their inheritance in the land, they were exiled from the rest that God provided, and God's presence was withdrawn from their midst. And, my friend, we are subject to that same judgment. No one who claims to be part of the people of God yet lives in ongoing, unrepentant rebellion against the commands of God can anticipate inheriting all that God has promised or enjoying the rest that God provides. Instead, he or she can anticipate an eternity away from the presence of God.

While we struggle with the same sins and are subject to the same judgment, *we also share the same hope*—hope in God for restoration, renewal, and rest. We will see that along with the oracles pointing out sin and warning of the judgment to come, there are also oracles of hope, proclaiming the salvation to come—the same salvation we enjoy in part now and will enjoy in fullness later because *we await the same*

Savior through whom all of these hopes become reality. The people of the prophets' day looked into the future, placing all their hopes on the Messiah who would come, and they were saved. We look back, placing all our hopes on the Messiah who came, and we are saved.

That brings us to the fifth reason we should study the Prophetic Books. We should study them because *we enjoy a superior revelation*. Get this: when you read in Isaiah about the servant who will suffer, or in Ezekiel about the shepherd who will tend his flock, or in Daniel about someone "like a son of man," you can see more clearly than Isaiah or Ezekiel or Daniel the person they were writing about. Peter wrote:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. (1 Pet. 1:10–11)

Peter says that the prophets wrote about "the grace that was to be yours." What is this grace? Grace is and has always been more than a sentiment or an attitude or an action on God's part. God's grace has always centered on and flowed out of the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus said to the people of his day:

Blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but they didn't see it. And they longed to hear what you hear, but they didn't hear it. (Matt. 13:16–17 NLT)

The prophets wrote beyond that which they could see and understand in the way that we can. They did not live to see the Word of the Lord who came, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. The Spirit of Christ spoke to them about his person and his work, his suffering and his glory, but they did not live to lay their eyes on him. In fact, after God spoke to his prophet Malachi, it seemed that God had stopped speaking. There was only silence—four hundred years of silence. Some likely gave up waiting for all that the prophets had written about to be fulfilled. But others continued to long for the day when all God's promises would become reality. At the beginning of Luke's Gospel we read:

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." (Luke 2:25–32)

It is this salvation, this light, this glory, this person that we will see—perhaps in a fresh way—through our study of the Old Testament prophets.

The Person in the Prophets We Must See

In our study of the Prophetic Books, *we'll see the predictions that Jesus fulfilled*. The prophets are full of specific predictions about who the Messiah would be, where he would come from, and what he would do. Isaiah wrote that a virgin would conceive and bear a son who would be called Immanuel (Matt. 1:23 cf. Isa. 7:14; 8:1, 10). That's Jesus. Micah wrote that a shepherd king would come out of Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). That's Jesus. Zechariah told Israel to "Behold, your king coming to you . . . humble and mounted on a donkey" (Zech. 9:9), which was fulfilled when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, hailed as a king, riding on a donkey (Matt. 21:4). Isaiah wrote of one who was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins, beaten so we could be whole, whipped so we could be healed (Isaiah 53). Daniel wrote of an "anointed one" who would be killed, appearing to have accomplished nothing (Daniel 9). That's Jesus.

For most of my life, if you had asked me how or where the Old Testament spoke of Christ, I would have pointed to these kinds of specific predictions regarding who the Messiah would be and things he would do. And these are so very significant. But as we work our way through the prophets, we're going to see how they point us to Jesus

in other ways as well, so that Jesus could say that the whole of the Old Testament was most profoundly about him (Luke 24:27).

Second, we'll see problems that Jesus solves. The Old Testament is an unfinished book. It ends with needs that have not been met, problems that have not been solved, and tensions that have not been resolved. When we come to the end of the history recorded in the Old Testament, a small group of Israelites has returned to Jerusalem and gone to work rebuilding the city. But their capital city is not the powerful fortress it once was. They have no king on the throne like they once had in David and Solomon. They have rebuilt the temple, but it is certainly not as magnificent as the temple once was; it comes nowhere near the descriptions of the glorious temple that the prophets said would one day be in Jerusalem. God's covenant people are living in the land given to them by God, but they simply cannot live up to their part of the covenant commitment. When they do have a heart to obey, it just doesn't last.

Yet they have this word from God through the prophets that promises a greater redemption than their forefathers experienced from Egypt, greater than they experienced coming home from Babylon. They have the promises of a great city, a land of abundance to live in, a glorious temple in which God dwells, and a righteous king on the throne. So how could they reconcile the limited nature of their redemption, their city, their temple, and their covenant and king with the glorious promises made through the prophets? Jesus does that.

Jesus accomplished a far greater redemption than just returning one people group to a run-down land. His gospel is going out as his Word is preached so that he is redeeming people from every tribe and tongue to make one holy nation that will live forever with him in a glorious land. Jesus is the great king who rules over his people in perfect justice and righteousness. Jesus himself is the temple where God's people commune with God. Jesus is the better mediator of a better covenant, not only because he has written his law on our hearts by his Spirit, but also because he has taken upon himself the covenant curse for our disobedience. We're going to see how Jesus meets the needs, solves the problems, and resolves the tensions left unanswered, unsolved, and unresolved throughout the Old Testament.

Third, we'll see people in whom Jesus was prefigured. Ever since Moses wrote, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen" (Deut. 18:15), the people of God looked for and waited for that great prophet. Many of the prophets God sent provided glimpses of the great prophet he would one day send. Jeremiah, in his weeping over the sin of his people and the judgment to come because of that sin, prefigured Jesus, who wept over the city of Jerusalem, which would not repent and turn to him. Hosea, as the bridegroom paying the ransom so that he could bring home his unfaithful bride to love and cleanse, prefigured Jesus, who paid the ransom so that he might bring us home to God. Jonah's three days in the belly of a great fish provided a picture that Jesus himself called upon to point to the three days he would spend in the belly of the earth.

"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets," we've read in Hebrews 1, and it continues: "but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb. 1:1–2). Jesus was the great prophet that all the prophets pointed to. Yet he was not just a messenger declaring a message from God—he is the message.

Finally, we'll see a pattern that Jesus superseded. There is a pattern in the Old Testament—the pattern of God's having a son put to the test of obedience to his word. Understanding this pattern helps us to make sense not just of the Prophetic Books but of the whole Bible. In Genesis we read that God created the world and made man, male and female, in his image and put them in the garden he had created so that they would obey his word and enjoy his blessing and be fruitful and multiply so that his world would be filled with human beings, enjoying his creation, his blessings, and his presence with them. But Adam, this first son, was disobedient and was expelled from God's land of Eden.

But God did not abandon his purpose; instead his purpose became a promise. The pattern was repeated as God called a people to himself and brought them out of the chaos and bondage of Egypt to live in the land he provided. There they were to be a kingdom of priests, enjoying his blessing and obeying the Word he had given them at Mount Sinai. He gave them a king to rule over them and came down to dwell

among them in the temple. And for a time, it was almost like his people were back in the garden of Eden, as they enjoyed God's blessing and his presence in the Promised Land. But it didn't last. When we come to the time of the prophets, we find this son, the nation of Israel, rebelling and refusing to obey God's Word, just as Adam did in the garden. Like Adam, they found themselves under God's judgment, exiled from the land that God had given to them, a small refugee community in Babylon. They lost their land, their king, their temple, and their city, and, as far as they were concerned, they had lost their God.

But God clearly had not abandoned them. He was still speaking through his prophets, promising them that he would repeat the pattern again. But this time he would do it in a way that could not be ruined by human sin. There would be another son, the second Adam, the true Israel. He would obey rather than rebel. He would make a new covenant. He would bring a new city in which he would be the king and the temple. What God intended to do through him would be on a whole new scale. It wouldn't be confined to one family or one nation. It would be for the benefit of all the peoples of the world.

As we study the prophets, we can never think that the exiles' returning to the land, putting a monarch on a throne, or rebuilding the temple was the fulfillment of all God promised through his prophets. Those things were only partial fulfillment. Nor can we think that their physical descendants, the Jewish people of today, being regathered to a particular piece of real estate and rebuilding a temple made of limestone in which animal sacrifices are reinstated, is something to anticipate as a fulfillment of God's promises through his prophets. God's intention has always been to far surpass those limited physical blessings and to bless us "in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3). The pattern has been superseded by Jesus and will not regress to merely physical fulfillments. "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him" (2 Cor. 1:20).

There is so much to see of Jesus in the books we are about to study, and I hope your eyes are peeled to take it all in.

∞ In Jonah we'll see by contrast the compassion of Jesus, who ran toward those under judgment rather than away from them.

☞ In Hosea we'll see Jesus as our faithful bridegroom, who paid the price of his own blood to redeem us, his unfaithful bride, from our slavery to sin.

☞ In Micah we'll see the humble justice and mercy of Jesus as the one whose life and death answers Micah's difficult question: "What does the LORD require?" (6:8).

☞ In Isaiah we'll see Jesus as the divine King seated on the throne Isaiah saw in the year King Uzziah died, as the suffering servant who will be punished in place of his people, and as the coming conqueror who will put an end to evil.

☞ In Habakkuk we'll see that Jesus is the one by whom sinful, faithless people are credited the righteousness needed to live by faith.

☞ In Jeremiah we'll see Jesus finally fulfilling God's promise of a new covenant that will implant in us a heart that wants to obey.

☞ In Daniel we'll see Jesus as the glorious Son of Man who has received from the Ancient of Days a kingdom that will never oppress and never pass away.

☞ In Ezekiel we'll see the promised presence of Jesus with us, never to leave us, in a new city called "The LORD is There" (48:35).

☞ And, finally, in Malachi, as we consider the question, "Who can stand when he appears?" (3:2) we'll see Jesus, who makes it possible for us to say with confidence, "I will be able to stand when he appears—not because I am clean or good or worthy in myself, but because the Word of the Lord who came has come to me and made me his own."

Over and over again in the prophets we'll read that "the word of the Lord came to" his prophet. And when we read these words, we will recognize the voice of this Word, the Word who was with God, the Word who was God, the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us, the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:1, 14). We'll know that Christ was speaking not only to the prophets and not only to the people in the prophets' day, but also to us, revealing himself to us in new ways, calling us to himself in fresh and perhaps costly ways, and promising himself to us in saving ways.

Discussion Guide

An Introduction to the Prophets

Getting the Discussion Going

1. Nancy mentioned several things that make studying the Prophetic Books challenging: the fact that we are unfamiliar with the historical and geographical setting, that the oracles are repetitive and confusing, and that we misunderstand the nature of prophecy. Can you relate to any of those, or are there other aspects of the Prophetic Books that you find intimidating or challenging?

2. Many of us have Bibles that include maps to help us with the geography, and timelines of the kings and prophets to help us with the flow of history. Let's take a minute to look in our Bibles to see and share with each other what resources we might have at our fingertips to help us overcome this challenge to studying the Prophetic Books. (For example, on page 1232 of the *ESV Study Bible*, there is a timeline entitled "Activity of the Writing Prophets during the Reigns of the Kings of Israel and Judah." In the back, map 6 displays the divided kingdom, and map 7 displays the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires that took Israel and Judah into exile.)

Getting to the Heart of It

3. While the priests in Israel were all from the tribe of Levi, and the kings descended from other kings, none of the prophets became a prophet

because his father was a prophet. Some of the prophets were priests, but most were ordinary people called by God in a variety of ways, from a variety of backgrounds, to speak for God. Read the following verses and note the different ways God called and instructed his prophets.

- ≈ Isaiah 6:1–9
- ≈ Jeremiah 1:1–9
- ≈ Ezekiel 1:1–3; 2:1–3; 3:27
- ≈ Hosea 1:2
- ≈ Amos 7:14–15
- ≈ Jonah 1:1

4. In 2 Peter 1:21 we read: “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” How does this help to explain why the content of the Prophetic Books is somewhat repetitive and never contradictory, although it varies in style and setting?

5. Turn to 1 Peter 1:10–12. Discuss what these verses reveal about:

- ≈ the subject of the Prophetic Books
- ≈ the limits to the prophets’ understanding
- ≈ the source of the prophets’ message
- ≈ the specifics of what was revealed
- ≈ the reason the prophets wrote down their prophecy

Getting Personal

6. What did you read or hear in the teaching that helps you to believe that what the prophets had to say to the people of their day might also speak to you today? And what do you think is required for you to hear that message?

Getting How It Fits into the Big Picture

7. We’re going to see, as we work our way through the Prophetic Books, that much of what the prophets said was going to happen, did hap-

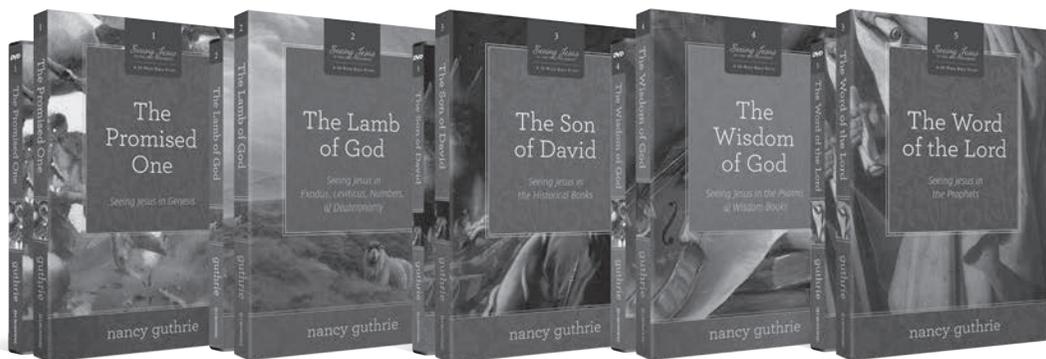
pen shortly after the prophecy was given. Some of it was fulfilled in the incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ. Some of it is being fulfilled now as the gospel of Christ brings life to peoples and nations throughout the earth. And some of it is yet to be fulfilled, when Christ returns to establish the new heaven and the new earth. What does this tell us about the value of studying the message of the prophets?



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Apologetics, Westminster Seminary California



nancy guthrie teaches the Bible at conferences around the country and is currently pursuing graduate studies at Covenant Theological Seminary. She is the author of numerous books, including the Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament Bible study series, and is the editor of *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross* and *Be Still, My Soul*.