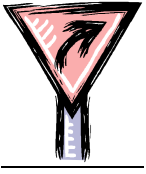


The Latter Prophets

Group Study 7



Many feel this is the part of the Bible that most points to Christ and of course this is true. However, it does so much more. It helps us understand further how the Pentateuch and the former prophets speak of Christ, and also how they can be so misunderstood.

- **Who gives the prophets the right to speak as they do?**
- **The exile and why it occurred**
- **The judgement of God**
- **The righteousness of God**
- **After the exile is not it!**

Who gives the prophets the right to speak as they do?

Isaiah is the first and the longest of all the latter prophets. His calling has the hallmarks of all the other prophets (See Ezekiel 1-2 and Jonah 1:1).

Questions:

1. Read Isaiah 6:1-8 and John 12:41. Who called Isaiah to be a prophet? What is the subject of his book?

In a world of political insecurity where kings die, the King of Kings who rules the world tells his prophets what to say. The encounter with Christ is not always as spectacular as it was for Isaiah or Ezekiel. Sometimes we read simply that the word of the Lord came to the prophet (See Jonah 1:1 and Micah 1:1). But all the prophets are sent by Christ to speak of Christ.

The prophets are sent by the King who judges the people – the only King who can save them.

Who are the prophets speaking to?

2. Read 1 Peter 1:10-12. Most of the prophets were not heard at the time they were writing, because of the political situation they were in. So why did they write and who did they write for?

The exile

It is important to realise God's covenant did not fail because Israel failed and were exiled. What we see in the Latter prophets is the Messiah asserting his authority, and revealing the power of the gospel in a failing world and to a failing church.

The exile had two parts – the ten tribes of Israel were exiled to Assyria, and the two tribes of Judah exiled to Babylon. The prophets are all based around the exile – some before (pre-exilic), some during the exile (exilic), and some afterwards (post-exilic).

Pre-exilic prophets to Israel – Amos, Hosea, Nahum, Obadiah

Pre-exilic prophets to Judah – Joel, Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk

Exilic prophet – Ezekiel

Post-exilic prophets – Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

The exile is described as a return to Egypt (See Hosea 11:1-2 and Isaiah 52:4) and therefore helps us to understand what the Exodus foreshadowed.

...and why it occurred

The exile occurred because the people rebelled against God's rule over them in Christ. All of the latter prophets explain this in some detail. However even when God is angry with them he is still showing mercy.

3. Read Malachi 1:6. How is the people's response to judgement summed up?

So how had the people shown contempt for the name of God?

Even though they had **Zion** they had forgotten the Saviour who gave it to them and the purpose of it pointing them to heaven. In a word they had become 'complacent'. See Amos 6:1.

Even though they had the **temple** they had turned it from a place of rejoicing in their Saviour's presence, to a place where they pretended sin didn't exist. It had become their 'lucky' place that would protect them in times of trouble. See Jeremiah 7:3-15.

Even though they had **priests** they had forgotten they were to point to the great high priest and were concerned only with increasing their numbers, which simply ended in an increase of sin. See Hosea 4:7-9.

Even though they still had **sacrifices and feasts** to enjoy God, they were turned into an excuse to enjoy themselves and Christ was left out. See Hosea 8:13-14.

They still **prayed and fasted** but even that was twisted to avoid Jesus being Lord over every part of their lives. See Isaiah 1:15, Jeremiah 14:11-12 and Zechariah 7:4-11

Worst of all some still could hear and enjoy **the preaching of God's word**, but not put it into practice, turning it into a form of amusement. See Ezekiel 33:30-33.

They had begun to worship what Christ had created and ignored and rejected Christ the Creator (See Romans 1:25). The land and all the blessings that were in it pointed them to the Saviour, but they had been turned into obstacles between them and the Saviour.

The exile, as painful as it was, was necessary to bring them back to Christ and life in him.

Pause for thought

Can you see ways in which you pretend you are following Christ but in fact you are turning from Him?

Not all bad news?

The land in ruins, the temple destroyed, the priests removed and nowhere to sacrifice or feast. There was even a famine of God's word (See Amos 8:11-12). But God still doesn't destroy the world. As Adam and Eve were exiled so the Israelites are exiled but his purpose is to bring them back to himself so that they will look only to him.

Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? Declares the sovereign LORD. Rather am I not pleased when they turn from their wicked ways and live? (Ezekiel 18:23 NIV)

However even now, when all of the signs are removed, there are still prophets and others who are trusting the Saviour, who all the signs were pointing to.

4. Read Habakkuk 3:17-19 and 2:4. How were they able to do this when everything around them collapsed?

5. Read Romans 1:16-17. How does Romans (the great Bible study aid on the Old Testament) quoting the key verse in Habakkuk (2:4) explain how to live for God.

6. Read Romans 8:35-39 Can anything separate us from his love?

Hope is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And even if all the signs (the land, Zion, the priests and sacrifices) are twisted and destroyed he does not and cannot leave those who look to him.

Pause for thought

What are we to do when everything is falling apart around us?

The judgement of God

As you read the latter prophets there is a strong emphasis on the judgement of God and his wrath – why?

Further Questions.

7. Read Romans 1:16-18. What does Paul start with in Romans when he wants them to understand the gospel?

8. Read Jeremiah 9:13-16. God scatters Israel and judges them first. Why?

9. Read Ezekiel 11:12. What is his purpose in judgement?

What about the rest of the world?

Now we know that whatever the law says it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God (Romans 3:19, NIV).

There are vast passages in the Latter prophets on this worldwide judgement (Ezekiel 25-32, Jeremiah 46-51, Isaiah 13-23 & 34).

10. Read Ezekiel 25:11. What is God's purpose for the nations?

11. Read Romans 15:8-13. What is his desire for the nations?

The judgement passages are there to prepare for mercy. They demonstrate the false so that people will reject it and follow the Messiah.

The righteousness of God

God still does not completely destroy. Instead he provides a righteousness to take away their sin.

In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord our Righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6 and Jeremiah 33:16 NIV).

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify (Romans 3:21 NIV).

Read Jeremiah 31:10-11 and Exodus 19:4. The righteousness of God is revealed as he gathers and redeems them. Just as he gathered them at Sinai

12. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. The righteousness of God is revealed in a new covenant. The old one was only a foreshadowing – this one deals with sin! What does this new covenant do?

13. Read Jeremiah 23:5-8. The righteousness of God is revealed in a new Davidic King. What will this King do?

14. Read Ezekiel 47:1, John 4:14 and John 7:38. The righteousness of God is revealed in a new temple out of which flows refreshing life-giving water. Where is this temple seen in the Bible?

15. Read Isaiah 65:17. The righteousness of God revealed in a new creation. Who will be part of this new creation?

16. Read Ezekiel 34:11-13 and 34:26-31, John 10:11 and 2 Corinthians 5:17. How does anyone become part of the new creation?

Read Isaiah 42:6. The righteousness of God is revealed in salvation for the nations.

17. Read Isaiah 11:1-4, 42:1, 49:1-3, 61:1. The righteousness of God is seen in the Lord's anointed. What does the Lord's anointed do? What is he anointed with?

18. Read Matthew 3:15-17. Who is Jesus anointed with? What does he mean when he speaks of "fulfilling all righteousness"?

Pause for thought

Where do we turn when we feel far from God?

After the exile is not it

The number of people who return from the exile is very small. The ten northern tribes are scattered among the nations or intermarried with foreigners – so their identity as the people of Israel is compromised. Of those returning from Babylon the whole company numbered only 42,360 (See Ezra 2:64), small compared even with those coming out of the Exodus (See Numbers 1:45-46). This is hardly what was promised in Jeremiah (See Jeremiah 33:22). The temple rebuilt is not the huge structure promised in Ezekiel and compares badly with Solomon's (See Haggai 2:3).

Malachi ends the latter prophets and his message is clear. The people might have returned to the land. The temple although smaller might have been rebuilt. But the same problems remain. But the hope is this – the Lord is coming.

"I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me and I will return to you." Says the LORD Almighty (Malachi 3:6-7 NIV).

"Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel." See I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes (Malachi 4:4-6 NIV).

The gospels start with a tremendous sense of anticipation. Where is the Lord's Anointed (the Christ)?

Jesus said "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:18-21 NIV).

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God (2 Corinthians 1:20 NIV).

Jesus gathers and redeems his people, Jesus brings the new covenant, Jesus is the true Davidic King, Jesus is building a new temple called the church, Jesus brings the new creation, and Jesus is bringing salvation to the nations. All the promises are yes in him. Jesus is the Lord's anointed, as Peter cries to him, 'You are the Christ' (Mark 8:29). **The righteousness the prophets testify to is faith in Jesus Christ.**

19. Read Romans 3:21-22. What is the difference between you and the Old Testament believer in terms of your position in Christ?

Summary Questions:

What did this study teach me about Jesus?

What did this study teach me about the Bible?

What did this study teach me about myself?

Jesus



The Latter prophets

Home Study 7



Day 1

Read Jeremiah 7:1-15

What is the false hope of Israel and what causes the exile?

Day 2

Read Jeremiah 31:1-14

After the exile what does God do for his people?

Day 3

Read Jeremiah 31:21-40

What does God promise to give his people?

Day 4

Read Isaiah 11:1-12

What is the new Davidic King like?

Day 5

Read Ezekiel 37:15-27

What will the new Davidic King do?

Day 6

Read Isaiah 65:17-25

What is the land God promises like?

Day 7

Read Isaiah 40:1-11 and Matthew 3:1-12

Who announces the end of the true exile?