

Old Testament Genre: Prophecy

By Joshua Williams

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read Ezekiel 3:16–21 and then read the comments related to Ezekiel 3:17 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: Why was the job of a watchman important for ancient cities surrounded by walls?

Assignment Two

Read Jeremiah 31:15–17, and then read the comments related to Jeremiah 31:15 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What is the meaning of the figurative language about Rachel weeping for her children? Who is the passage talking about and why?

Assignment Three

Read Isaiah 45:20–21 and then read the comments related to Isaiah 45:21 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: How does God show He is different from the idols of the nations?

Scripture to Memorize

Yet the LORD warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments and My statutes, in accordance with all the law that I commanded your fathers, and that I sent to you by My servants the prophets."

2 Kings 17:13

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will know the purposes for prophecy and how to interpret it according to its purposes.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

The Parker family just finished lunch at a Chinese restaurant. When the waiter brings the check, he leaves behind a couple of fortune cookies. Daniel, age twelve, picks up the cookie, cracks it open and reads the fortune to everybody: "Beware. Today danger will threaten you." Of course, fortune cookies don't have fortunes like that. They are intended to make you feel better. But if you got one that read like a threat, how would you feel? What if you could know that some disaster was only days away? What would you do?

Prophecy as a Word of Warning

Read Ezekiel 3:16–21 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 16. end of seven days. The seven days refers to the time recorded in verse 15.

Verse 17. Son of man. The phrase means "one who is just human" and so could be translated "human" or "mortal." **watchman.** When cities had walls surrounding them, a watchman would stand on the wall to look for any signs of trouble that might harm those in the city. God used a figure of speech to compare Ezekiel's job as a prophet to that of a city watchman.

Verse 18. "You shall surely die." God spoke about the future of the individual, but His words were intended as a warning for the person to stop doing evil immediately so that he may not die. **his blood I will require at your hand.** This statement means God will hold Ezekiel responsible for his part in the person's death—just as a watchman on a city wall who did not sound the alarm when he saw danger would be responsible for some of the damage done to the city.

Verse 19. die for his iniquity. Here the person physically dies because he sins. **delivered your soul.** In other words, Ezekiel will have fulfilled his job and would not be punished by physical death for this.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now report on why the job of a watchman was important for a city.

Discussion Question

Why does God tell Ezekiel to warn the wicked about future death?

Studying the Passage

Verse 20. righteous person. Here Ezekiel was not speaking in absolute terms. He was talking about someone who generally obeys the law of Moses. **turns from.** That is, he deliberately disobeys God's instructions, especially to follow after other gods. **shall not be remembered.** The situation is similar to a seventy-year-old who commits a crime. Even though he spent many years not breaking the law, after his crime, he is a criminal.

Verse 21. took warning. God's word through Ezekiel was intended as a warning so that people wouldn't sin.

Discussion Question

How important is it to take God's warning to heart? What happens if you do, and what happens if you don't?

Prophecy as a Word of Comfort

Read Jeremiah 31:15–17 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 15. Ramah. This is a city in Israel. **Rachel.** Rachel was the grandmother of Ephraim and Manasseh, the ancestors of the tribes in the Northern Kingdom. The figurative language was intended to portray sadness over the Northern Kingdom because they had been conquered by Assyria. **they are no more.** That is, they had been defeated and removed from their land.

Verse 16. Keep . . . from weeping. Rachel was commanded to stop mourning. Her sadness will be turned to joy. **Reward for your work.** Her work here was her mourning. Her mourning will turn into joy. **Come back from.** Israel had been defeated and taken captive by the Assyrians. In the future they will return to the land of Israel.

Verse 17. hope for your future. This prophecy communicated hope in the future for those of Israel who would hear it. **own country.** They will have their old lands back.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now report on the meaning of the figurative language about Rachel weeping for her children.

Discussion Question

Since comforting someone requires that the person is hurting, why does God comfort His people? Why were they hurting in the first place?

Prophecy as Evidence of God's Uniqueness

Read Isaiah 45:20–21 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 20. Assemble yourselves. God was speaking to people from other nations who worshipped false gods through idols. The scene is a courtroom where those involved are called to appear before the judge. **They have no knowledge.** That is, they do not understand what is really going on now or in the future. **cannot save.** Because an idol is just wood, it cannot help a person.

Verse 21. Present your case. The scene is still a courtroom. The nations are called upon to present a case for their gods. **Declare.** What is announced is God's deliverance of Israel and returning Israel back to its land. The prophets spoke of this event long before it happened. **Was it not I, the LORD?** Since the Lord is the only One who is able to proclaim the future before it happens, He is the only true God. **A righteous God and a Savior.** God is unlike the idol gods because (1) He is righteous, meaning He does what He says He will do, and (2) He can save, meaning He can restore His people Israel back to their land.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now report on how God shows He is different from the idols of the nations.

Discussion Question

Which seems more important for understanding prophecy: finding out exactly how it is fulfilled or responding to the word of warning or the word of hope that is prophesied? Why?

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to. . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

The Old Testament contains five Major Prophets and twelve Minor Prophets (called “minor” because their books are shorter). However, prophecy appears in other Old Testament books, as well. Prophecy accomplishes three primary purposes.

1. **Warning.** Most of prophecy serves as a warning. In Ezekiel 3:17–21 God called Ezekiel to serve as a watchman, warning God’s people about the judgment that would result if they continued to disobey Him. Jeremiah 18:6–7 says that whenever a people stop doing evil because God has warned them of future judgment, God will relent from the judgment He was going to bring.
2. **Comfort.** In the middle of God’s words of judgment, He sprinkles words of comfort. Jeremiah 31:15–17 shows that even though God had brought disaster on Israel, He would restore them. He promised that there is still a bright future for God’s people. He will not abandon them.
3. **Proof of God’s uniqueness.** God is the only One who knows the future. Isaiah 45:20–21 shows that He is the only One who can speak and make it happen. He is the only One who saves. Isaiah 46:8–10 shows that God knows how things will end before they are even started.

The most important part of interpreting prophecy is responding properly to its purpose.

- When prophecy presents a word of warning, examine yourself so that you may stop doing what is evil.
- When prophecy presents a word of comfort, trust in God that He will deliver you from your pain.

Disciples know that He is God alone. He is the only One who can do all that He says He will and the only One who can save. In the power of the Spirit, disciples embrace His Word, listen to His voice, and live for His glory alone.

Follow up Question

What are the three purposes of prophecy?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.