

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY?

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WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY?

Lesson One: Joel and Jonah

GOD'S SLEIGHT OF HAND

The story of Jonah is one of the most unique in the entire Bible, and not simply because of his toddler-friendly interlude with the great fish. Indeed, it is most noteworthy because of the insight it gives us into the purposes of God.

We don't have to be particularly good Bible scholars to see that the story of Jonah is about salvation. The people of Nineveh are wicked, and Jonah's job is to warn them so that they will repent and be saved from the coming disaster. God invests a great deal of effort in trying to get Jonah to see that these people, enemies of Israel though they be, are worthy of salvation as well.

More subtly, though, the story is also about the salvation of Jonah.

Even though God wants to give the Ninevites the opportunity to save themselves, Jonah is not interested in helping. He is so afraid of the prospect of success that he is willing to travel by ship across the Mediterranean to escape. When he ends up at Nineveh anyway and succeeds in carrying out God's work, he is resentful that God made him do it. The story continues to show that even though God was done with Nineveh at that point, he still wasn't done with Jonah.

God's purposes are no different today. The work that we find before us may well tell us as much about God's will for us as about His will for others. As we carry out that work, imperfect though we are, we work out our own salvation too.

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON THIRTEEN

6. Isaiah 6-12

7. Isaiah 13-27

8. Isaiah 28-35

9. Isaiah 36-39

10. Isaiah 40-50

11. Isaiah 51-56

12. Isaiah 57-66



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Lesson Thirteen: Review

For each of the contexts given below, describe the main points and their relevance to God's people today.

1. Joel/Jonah
2. Amos
3. Hosea
4. Micah
5. Isaiah 1-5

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON ONE

1. According to Joel 1:1-3, how common is the event that the people of Judah are experiencing? According to 1:4, what is it? What consequences of this event do 1:5-12 describe? Why is this significant?
2. In 2:1, what label is applied to this event? Do 2:2-10 still appear to be about the locust plague? What does this show us about the use of the phrase "the day of the Lord" in Scripture?
3. What does 2:11 reveal about God's anger? What other option does 2:12 point out? What key idea does 2:13 present? How do 2:13-14 describe God's reaction? What does this text show us about Him?
4. What prophecy appears in 2:28-29? Where else in Scripture do we find this? Why is this important?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON ONE

5. What other events are predicted in 2:30-31? Does this literally happen in Acts? What does this show? What promise is made in 2:32? Why is this significant?

6. What two promises does God make in 3:1-3? In 3:4-7, what does God predict will happen? What contrast emerges in 3:17-21? What does this teach us?

7. Whom do we meet in Jonah 1:1? According to 1:1-2, what does God tell him? According to 1:3, how does Jonah react? Why would he do this? What does it reveal about his heart?

8. What does God do in 1:4? What steps does the crew take in 1:5-13? In 1:14-15, what do they eventually do? In 1:15-16, what result does this have? What does this teach us?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON TWELVE

9. How does God describe Himself in 65:1-2? In 65:3-5, how does He describe the people? What does He promise in 65:6-7? What else does He promise in 65:8-12? What should we learn from this?

10. What two sets of outcomes appear in 65:13-16? What general promise do we find in 65:17? What specifics of this promise are given in 65:18-25? What does this prefigure?

11. How does God describe Himself in 66:1-2? What two different outcomes are presented in 66:2-4? What promise do we find in 66:5-6? What does this tell us about God's attitude toward the righteous?

12. What does God promise in 66:15? According to 66:16-19, what does this mean for the wicked? According to 66:20-22, what does it mean for the righteous? According to 66:23-24, what two things will the righteous see? What does this mean for us today?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON TWELVE

5. What claim appears in 61:1? According to 61:1-2, what will happen as a result? What prediction is offered in 61:3-7? According to 61:8-9, what about God's nature will cause this to happen? How are the people described as reacting in 61:10-11? What can we take from this?
6. What question and answer do we find in 63:1? What follow-up question is asked in 63:2? What explanation is given in 63:3-6? How should this shape our understanding of God?
7. How is God's conduct presented in 63:7-9? What happens in 63:10? According to 63:10-14, how does God react? What appeal is made in 63:15-19? What attribute of God does this text highlight?
8. What does Isaiah ask in 64:1-2? How does he describe God in 64:3-5? According to 64:6-7, what have the people done? According to 64:8-12, what appeal does Isaiah make? What can we learn from his words here?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON ONE

9. What happens to Jonah in 1:17? What does Jonah do in 2:1-9? In 2:10, what result does this have? How does Jonah's prayer make an ironic contrast with his attitude toward the Ninevites?
10. What happens in 3:1-2? What does Jonah do in 3:3-4? In 3:5-9, how do the people react? In 3:10, what does God do? What does this show about Him?
11. In 4:1, how does Jonah take the repentance of the Ninevites? In 4:2, how does he explain himself to God? According to 4:3, what does he want? What does God ask in 4:4? What are we to make of this exchange?
12. What does Jonah do in 4:5? According to 4:6-8, what does God do? What does God ask in 4:9? How does Jonah reply? What does God explain in 4:10-11? What does this teach us?



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Lesson Two: Amos

GOD'S WHOLE COUNSEL

Depending on where we go to church, the book of Amos is likely either to get a lot of play or almost none at all. In more left-leaning churches, Amos is one of the cornerstones of what is called “liberation theology”. Adherents of this belief argue that the purpose of Christianity is to promote social justice, to protect the poor from oppression at the hands of the rich. In practice, we might wonder whether this form of religion owes more to Che Guevarra than to Jesus Christ.

At the other end of the ideological spectrum, such as in the churches of our brotherhood, Amos serves mainly as a placeholder between Joel and Obadiah in the books-of-the-Old-Testament song. Chris-

tians who could relate every nuance of the story of Nadab and Abihu or Uzza would draw a blank if asked to relate the main themes of Amos, even though Amos' writings occupy far more space in Scripture than Nadab, Abihu, and Uzza do put together.

This shouldn't be an either-or situation. It should be a both-and situation. Yes, God requires that He be treated as holy in the midst of the congregation. Yes, we must seek Him according to the ordinance. However, it is equally true that God's ears are open to the cries of the poor, that greed and oppression sicken Him, and that He is pleased when His people are generous and just. If we truly want to please Him, we can't pick the parts of His counsel that we like. We must hear it all.

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON TWELVE

1. In Isaiah 57:14-15, how does God explain His purpose? In 57:16-18, how does He explain His thinking? What two different outcomes does He spell out in 57:19-21? What should we learn from this?
2. What contradiction emerges in 58:1-2? What do the people ask in 58:3? In 58:3-5, what explanation does God give? In 58:6-7, what course of conduct does He encourage? In 58:8-9, what promise does He make? What does this tell us about obedience?
3. What does God explain in 59:1-2? What sort of people does He describe in 59:3-8? According to 59:9-15, what result does this have? What does this teach us today?
4. What promise does God make in 60:1-3? This promise has three sub-parts, defined in 60:4-9, 10-18, and 19-22 respectively. Describe each. What did this mean originally? What does it mean to us?



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Lesson Twelve: Isaiah 57-66

IMPRESSING GOD

Just about every human being out there comes in with the built-in conviction that he or she is the center of the universe. This is hard to avoid. After all, we see with our own eyes, hear with our own ears, and feel with our own hearts. As a consequence, we assume that everything revolves around us, even when we may be off on the periphery. Brother So-and-So didn't have much to say to us at Bible study last Wednesday because he had a hard day at work, but we assume it's because he's nurturing some kind of grudge against us.

This self-centeredness can lead to some ludicrous mistakes, but when it comes to our relationship with God, the results are anything but funny. God is not merely the

center of the universe. He is its Creator. As Isaiah 66:1-2 indicates, the magnificence of His nature and His accomplishments makes it impossible for us to do anything that could impress Him. If we pursue a relationship with Him on our terms, His scorn will be our only reward.

Instead, we can only please Him with the acknowledgement that everything revolves not around us, but around Him. When we come to Him, not with an inflated sense of our own self-importance, but with humility, contrition, and holy fear, is when He begins to take notice. Many find this impossible. They can't place anyone, even God, above themselves. However, only as we come to Him with this lowly attitude can we hope to find His favor and reward.

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON TWO

1. What pattern predominates in Amos 1:1-2:5? What nations are mentioned? What is promised to each? What does this show?
2. What final nation appears in 2:6? Why a special focus on it? In 2:6-8, 11-12, what sins are specified? According to 2:9-10, why should this nation have done differently?
3. What promise does God make in 3:1-2? What point is He making in 3:3-6? What else does He explain in 3:7-8? In this context, what is God trying to get His people to understand?
4. What does God command in 3:9-10? Why is this ironic? What does God reveal in 3:11-12? What does this show about Israel's fate?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON TWO

5. What specific evils does God identify in 3:13-4:3? Why these? In 4:4-5, what sarcastic advice does He give? What should this teach us?
6. What things does God do in 4:6-11? In each case, what is the result? According to 4:12-5:2, what will the final outcome be? Why is this important?
7. What does God say in 5:18? In 5:18-20, how does He explain Himself? How does He describe His attitude toward Israel in 5:21-22? In 5:23-24, what does He prescribe? What can we learn from this?
8. What pattern appears in 7:1-6? In 7:7-9, what does God decide to do instead? What's the difference? Why is this important?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON ELEVEN

5. What does God encourage in 54:1-2? In 54:3-8, what reasons does He provide? What promise does He make in 54:9-17? What does this reveal about God?
6. What exhortation appears in 55:1-3? In 55:3-4, what promise does God make? According to 55:5, what result will this have? What does this show about salvation?
7. What does God urge in 55:6-7? In 55:8-11, how does He explain Himself? According to 55:12-13, what result will this have? What does this teach us about God and His word?
8. What behavior does God encourage in 56:1-2? In 56:3-8, what two groups of outcasts does He identify? What does He promise each group if they obey? What does this reveal about God?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON ELEVEN

b. 53:1-3

c. 53:4-6

d. 53:7-9

e. 53:10-13

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON TWO

9. What happens in 7:10-11? In 7:12-13, what does Amaziah say to Amos? What reply does Amos make in 7:14-15? What prophecy does he utter in 7:16-17? What does this show us?

10. What does God show Amos in 8:1? What does He say in 8:2? What is the connection between these two things? What does God promise in 8:3? How does He explain this in 8:4-6? What's the point?

11. What does God promise in 8:9-10? What does He further promise in 8:11-12? According to 8:13-14, what result will this have? What does this reveal about the completeness of God's judgment?

12. What does God reveal in 9:8? According to 9:9-10, what will He do? According to 9:11-12, what will happen after that? In 9:13-15, what result will this have? What does this show us about God?



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Lesson Three: Hosea

GOD AND SIN

Back before I escaped from the dating scene into marriage, I had several girlfriends who were fond of a Christian romance novel called Redeeming Love. Though I've never read it, I understand that the plot is loosely based on the shocking true-life story of the prophet Hosea, who is called by God to marry a prostitute and put up with the resulting infidelities.

We have trouble imagining that God would ask any of His people to do such a thing, but He asked it of Hosea to prove a point. We readily grasp the misery of being married to a harlot. We less readily grasp the misery we inflict on God when we sin against Him.

When it comes to sin, it's easy for us to lapse into a bureaucratic

mindset. Thoughtlessly, we envision God as some sort of heavenly IRS agent, who doesn't give two hoots about us personally, but is very concerned about whether we have paid our spiritual dues. This version of Christianity isn't about love. It's about following the rules, and giving God as little as is necessary to avoid punishment.

In truth, God asks us to obey not because He doesn't care about us, but because He does. When we forsake the One who loves us so much and has given us so much for the hateful embrace of the devil, we fill Him with boundless sorrow. With a God like that, Christianity can never be a business relationship. It will always be personal. God has made Himself vulnerable to us, and His love asks more than rules ever could.

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON ELEVEN

1. In Isaiah 51:1-2, what does God urge? According to 51:3, what lesson would this teach? According to 51:4-8, why is it important to trust in God's righteousness? What does this teach us today?
2. 51:9-52:6 contains three "Wake up" statements. Where are they? To whom are they directed? In each case, why is wakefulness important? How do we need to wake up today?
3. What statement is made in 52:7? What are the people encouraged to do in 52:8-9? In 52:9-10, what reason is given for this? In 52:11, what does God ask? In 52:12, what promise is made? What should we take from this?
4. Whom do we meet again in 52:13? In the next chapter or so, Isaiah will point out five ironies about him. For each section below, identify the irony, and explain its significance.
 - a. 52:13-15



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Lesson Eleven: Isaiah 51-56

THE STRANGE SERVANT

Beginning in Isaiah 42:1, we meet the second of Isaiah's two strange characters, a man only described as the servant. The servant is every bit as confusing as the earlier figure of the Messiah, but for different reasons. The strangeness of the servant does not consist of his dual nature, but of his dual fates.

On the one hand, the servant is presented gloriously, a man chosen by God to bring salvation not only to Israel, but to all of the nations, whose success will bring him great glory. On the other hand, this servant will be marred more than the sons of men and be rejected by the very people he came to help. To describe his nature as enigmatic would be an understatement.

ment. Hundreds of years later, the Ethiopian eunuch asks, "About whom does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Indeed, the eunuch's confusion extends to everything about this mysterious figure.

If all we had to go on were the book of Isaiah, we could conclude very little more than that. Only as applied to Jesus does the prophecy of the servant make sense. Its paradoxes point to the ultimate paradox of the story of Jesus, that God could put on flesh and live as a man, that the Creator could allow Himself to be killed by and for His creation, and that a man executed as a criminal on earth could reign forever as King of heaven. Isaiah foretold Him, but only in Him can we understand Isaiah.

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON THREE

1. In Hosea 1:1, what do we learn about Hosea himself? What command does he receive in 1:2? In 1:3, what does he do about this? What are our thoughts on this?
2. According to 1:4-9, what is Hosea to name his children? Why? What contrast is promised in 1:10-2:1? Why?
3. What does God say in 2:2? What does He warn about in 2:3-4? How does He describe His people's condition in 2:5-8? What does He promise in 2:9-13? What does He promise in 2:14-15? What does this show us about God?
4. What does God say in 2:16? In 2:17, how does He explain this? What does He promise in 2:19-20? What does He predict in 2:20-23? What does this teach us about God's forgiveness?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON THREE

5. What does God tell Hosea to do in 3:1? In 3:2, what does Hosea do about this? Who is this, probably? What does Hosea say to her in 3:3? How is the spiritual significance of this explained in 3:4-5? What do we think of this?

6. In 4:1-2, how does God accuse His people? According to 4:3, what result does this have? What basic problem does God identify in 4:4-6? Who is responsible? What does this teach us?

7. What are God's people presented as saying in 6:1-3? According to 6:4, how does God take this? According to 6:5, what has He done in response? In 6:6, how does He explain His actions? What lesson does this hold for us?

8. In 7:4, how does God identify His people? What other comparison does he make here? In 7:5-8, how does God develop this metaphor? What problem does He identify in 7:9-10? How can this be a problem today?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON TEN

9. According to 46:3-4, what is the pattern of God's conduct toward Israel? What is the comparison made between the god of 46:5-7 and the God of 46:8-11? According to 46:12, what does God want? In 46:13, how does He explain this? Why is this text important to our faith?

10. How does God describe the motivation for His former prophecies in 48:3-5? According to 45:6-8, what is He doing now? According to 49:9-11, why is He doing this? What does this show us about God?

11. About whom is 49:5 written? In 49:6-7, what does God promise him? According to 49:8-13, what will God accomplish through him? What conclusion is repeated in 49:14? In 49:15-17, how is this conclusion addressed. Why is this text important?

12. In 50:4, who is speaking? According to 50:5-6, what has happened to him? According to 50:7-9, what will be the outcome of this? What two kinds of people and two outcomes are discussed in 50:10-11? What do we begin to see in this text?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON TEN

5. Who is introduced in 42:1? How is he described in 42:1-4? According to 42:5-9, for what will God use him? Why is this significant?

6. What behavior does 44:9-11 condemn? What irrational contrast does Isaiah describe in 44:12-17? According to 44:18-20, what's the basic problem here? How can we apply this text to idolatry today?

7. How does God describe Himself in 44:24-26? What specific promise does He make in 44:26-28? In 45:1, who is identified as the recipient of the next promise? According to 45:1-7, what will he receive? What is significant about this text?

8. How does God describe Himself in 45:18-19? Whom does He taunt in 45:20-21? What does He urge in 45:22? What does He promise in 44:23-25? How does this reveal the attitude of the Bible toward other religions?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON THREE

9. What contrast does God point out in 8:1-2? In 8:3, what result does this have? How does God describe His people's conduct in 8:4? In 8:5-7, what does God promise? What can we learn from this?

10. What does God predict in 10:3-4? To what does this likely refer? What else does God predict in 10:5-8? Where else do we see 10:8? Why is this important?

11. In 11:1-4, how does God describe the interaction between Israel and Him? What does He promise in 11:5-7? What does God ask in 11:8? In 11:9, what resolution does this lead to? What does this show us?

12. According to 14:1-3, what does God want Israel to do? What contingent promise does He make in 14:4-7? In 14:8-9, how does the book conclude? What are our impressions of Hosea as a whole?



WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY?

Lesson Four: Micah

WHAT GOD WANTS

The first passage of Scripture that I ever set out to memorize on my own was Micah 6:6-8. I appreciated it not only for its content but also for its poetic beauty. Micah eloquently proposes all sorts of things that he might bring to God on his own initiative but ultimately returns to a simple statement of what God requires: “to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”

Sadly, most of the religious world seems to be stuck in Micah 6:7. In the name of the Lord, people perform harsh penances, nail themselves to crosses every Easter, and hurl vast amounts of time, money, and effort into all kinds of good works. Interestingly enough, this behavior reveals both a great de-

votion to the Lord and a great lack of devotion. These are people who suffer greatly because they think it will please God, but before they start suffering, they don’t stop to ask Him what He wants. Instead, they’re trying to buy Him off with what they would want if they were in His place.

In reality, God’s core expectations haven’t changed in the two and a half millennia since Micah wrote. The weightier matters of the law are STILL justice, mercy, and faithfulness. God doesn’t want grotesque displays of piety. He wants us, which is both less than we would think and more than we can imagine. He’s not impressed by externals. Instead, He loves the heart that is wholly turned toward Him, for if the heart is His, then the life will surely follow.

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON TEN

1. What basic message is presented in Isaiah 40:1-2? What is predicted in 40:3-5? According to 40:6-8, how certain are these things? Why is this passage spiritually significant?
2. How are God’s future actions described in 40:9-11? What is revealed about Him in 40:12-17 that makes this plausible? What ridiculous alternative to God is brought up in 40:18-20? How does this help us understand our spiritual situation today?
3. How does 40:21-26 reveal the power of God? What question does Isaiah ask in 40:27? How does he show the absurdity of the question in 40:28-31? How can this reassure us today?
4. How does God describe His actions in 41:1-4? In 41:5-7, what does this provoke the nations to do? According to 41:8-10, what real hope does Israel have? What does this tell us about where we should turn for help?



WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY?

Lesson Ten: Isaiah 40-50

PROPHECY

Other than its predictions concerning the Messiah, one of the most intriguing features of Isaiah is the great specificity of its other prophecies. Most notably, Isaiah 44:28 and succeeding texts predict that a man named Cyrus will restore Jerusalem after it has been destroyed. This is particularly striking because the historical Cyrus the Great lived around 550 BC, nearly 150 years after the time of Isaiah the son of Amoz, and he did indeed return the Jews from exile.

Liberal scholars insist that this cannot be. They posit that Isaiah was actually written by two or three different men, if not a continuing school of authors trained in the Isaiah tradition, and that the prophecies concerning Cyrus were

written contemporaneously with his reign. Thus, they conclude, Isaiah actually provides no evidence for predictive prophecy.

The problem with these arguments is that they don't make sense when applied to the text. In Isaiah 46:9-10, God proclaims His ability to "declare the end from the beginning", and He clearly intends the Cyrus prophecy as proof of this claim. However, if the Cyrus prophecy was written after the fact, it proves nothing, and obviously so. How could the same man craft such a magnificent text, yet miss such a conspicuous hole in his argument? "Deutero-Isaiah" would have had to have been both genius and idiot. The book of Isaiah only makes logical sense as the genuine prophetic work of the one whose name it bears.

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON FOUR

1. In Micah 1:1, what information do we get about the historical setting of this book? In 1:2-4, what does God reveal? How does 1:5 explain the reason for this? What does He promise in 1:6-7? What place is absent from this promise? Why is this important?
2. Who is described in 2:1-2? What does God promise in 2:3? According to 2:4-5, what ironic result will this have? What does this show about the consequences of sin?
3. In 2:6, what sentiment is ascribed to the people? What question does God ask in 2:7? According to 2:8-11, where does the problem really lie? Can similar problems arise today? If so, how?
4. In 3:1-4, what group does God indict? Why? What group does He indict in 3:5-8? Why? What disconnect between attitude and action appears in 3:9-11? According to 3:12, what result will this have? What can we learn from this?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON FOUR

5. In 4:1-6, what events are predicted? Does this language show up elsewhere in Scripture? What is it talking about? Why is it important for us to understand this?

6. In 5:2, who is addressed? What is she promised? What is unusual about the way the promised one is described? In 5:3-5, what results are predicted? Where else do we see this text? Why is it important?

7. What is the subject matter of the rest of 5:5 through 5:6? What will happen? According to 5:7-9, what will the result of this be? According to 5:10-15, what will happen to Jacob? Historically speaking, was this fulfilled? If so, how? Why is this important to recognize?

8. What question is asked in 6:6? In 6:6-7, what possible answers are proposed? According to 6:8, what is the real answer? What does this tell us about pleasing God?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON NINE

9. What sign does God promise in 37:30-32? What is this talking about? What does He promise in 37:33-35? In 37:36-38, what result does this have? What should we draw from this story? Why is it in Isaiah?

10. What happens in 38:1? In 38:2-3, how does Hezekiah take this? In 38:4-6, what result does this have? What sign does God offer in 38:7-8? What does this reveal about God?

11. How does Hezekiah describe his frame of mind in 38:9-15? In 38:16-19, what appeal does he make? In 38:20, what confidence does he express? What does this teach us about prayer?

12. What happens in 39:1-4? What does Isaiah reveal in 39:5-7? How does Hezekiah react in 39:8? Why? What do we think of this story?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON NINE

5. In 37:3, how does Hezekiah characterize his situation? In 37:4, what does he say is his only hope? In 37:5-7, what promise does he receive? In worldly terms, how likely does this seem?

6. What rumor comes to the ears of the Assyrians in 37:9? Why is this important? In 37:10-13, what do they do in response? Why? How does this show God's power beginning to work?

7. In 37:14, what does Hezekiah do? In 37:15-16, how does he address God? In 37:17-19, what does he point out? In 37:20, what does he ask God to do? Why? How should this remind us of the true nature of our service to God?

8. In 37:21-22, what does Isaiah do? In 37:23-25, how does God describe the Assyrian king? In 37:26-28, what does He reveal? What does He promise in 37:29? Why is this important for us to understand?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON FOUR

9. What advice is given in 6:9? In 6:10-12, what problem does the Lord address? According to 6:13-16, what result will this have? How is this result appropriate? What does this teach us about sin?

10. How does Micah describe his frame of mind in 7:1? In 7:2-6, how does he explain this? What does he say he will do in 7:7? What can we learn from this about the way we should respond to evil?

11. What does Micah say in 7:8? What does he predict in 7:9? According to 7:10, what result will this have? What does this show about God?

12. How is God described in 7:18? According to 7:19-20, what does He do as a result? Why should this passage be comforting to us?



WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY?

Lesson Five: Isaiah 1-5

THE ASSEMBLY

Isaiah begins to write in the middle of one of the longer periods of righteousness in the history of the nation of Judah. Both Uzziah and his son Jotham were faithful to the Lord, Uzziah's leprosy problems notwithstanding. Even though some of the people continued to worship on the high places, others sought the Lord in His temple at Jerusalem according to His word. During the time of the divided kingdom, it didn't get much better than that.

However, Isaiah points out a problem that exists even during these 70 years of comparative spiritual enlightenment. Sure, the people who lived in Jerusalem were faithful to the Lord in observing new moons and Sabbaths and appoint-

ed feasts. They were checking all the boxes on the worship checklist.

However, their lives weren't right with God. The same people who were so faithful in the sacrifices they offered were unfaithful in the lives they lived. They rejoiced not in righteousness, but in drunkenness, materialism, bribery, and oppression of the poor, and their wickedness had incurred the wrath of God.

Today, we too must take care that God is as present in our daily lives as He is in our assemblies. Make no mistake; our times of worship are important. However, our service to God when we are not assembled is just as important, and faithfulness in the former will not blind Him to faithlessness in the latter. He doesn't want four hours a week from us. He wants 168.

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON NINE

1. What happens in Isaiah 36:1-3? In 36:4-10, what message does the Rabshakeh convey? What fatal mistake has he already made? Other than that, assess Judah's situation.
2. What request do the Jewish officials make in 36:11? What answer do they get in 36:12? What does this show about these officials?
3. According to 36:13-15, what does the Rabshakeh want? In 36:16-17, what promise does he make? In 36:18-20, what warning does he offer? What do we think of the Rabshakeh's sales pitch?
4. According to 36:21, how do the people react to this? In 36:22, how do the Jewish officials react? What two reactions of Hezekiah are recorded in 37:1-2? How do things look for Judah?



WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY?

Lesson Nine: Isaiah 36-39

MISTAKES

One of the greatest kings of Judah was Hezekiah. Throughout his entire reign, he showed more zeal for the Lord than anyone else in his lineage except David. However, Hezekiah's righteousness didn't always equate to wisdom. Even though the narrative in this part of Isaiah is basically the same as that of 2 Kings 18-20, the context is very different. In 2 Kings, Hezekiah's reign is bracketed by the kingships of Ahaz and Manasseh, who are bad enough to make nearly anybody look good.

In Isaiah, by contrast, it follows the warning of Isaiah 30-31, in which God spells out in great detail the disaster that will befall His people if they are foolish enough to make an alliance with Egypt. Hezekiah,

though righteous, makes the rash decision to ignore this advice, and, as predicted, gets splattered by the Assyrian army. He loses Lachish and every other fortified place in Judah except Jerusalem before he is rescued by divine intervention, and, indeed, was so badly off that only divine intervention could have saved him.

Even today, righteous does not mean wise. Christians can marry rashly, make bad financial decisions, and fall prey to a host of other errors without falling away. However, as long as we don't forsake the Lord, He won't forsake us either. Like Hezekiah, we will have to suffer the consequences of our mistakes, but God will not allow them to destroy us. We will always find salvation through Him.

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON FIVE

1. What basic information about the book of Isaiah does Isaiah 1:1 reveal? What contrast does God present in 1:2-3? What situation is described in 1:4-7? What does this teach us about disobedience?
2. What does 1:9 reveal? In 1:10-15, what behavior does God condemn? In 1:16-18, what does He encourage? What two possible outcomes does He indicate in 1:19-20? What does this show us about serving God?
3. What decline is presented in 1:21-23? In 1:24-26, what remedy does God prescribe? According to 1:26-31, what two results will this have? What does this reveal about the judgments of God?
4. What is predicted in 2:1-3? How is this explained in 2:3-4? Where else in Scripture do we see this language? What is this talking about? Why is this important?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON FIVE

5. In 2:5, what does Isaiah encourage? In 2:6-8, how does he explain the need for this? In 2:9-17, what solution does God present? According to 2:18-22, what result will this have? What does this show about the dangers of human arrogance?

6. According to 3:1-5, what is God doing? As per 3:6-7, what result will this have? According to 3:8-9, why is this necessary? What does this show us about leading God's people?

7. What contrasting promises appear in 3:10-11? What problem do 3:12-15 identify? What does this reveal about the justice of God?

8. What does God predict in 3:16-17? In 3:18-4:1, what contrasts appear? What should we learn from this?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON EIGHT

9. Who are the subjects of 32:9? In 32:10-14, what are they warned about? In 32:15-20, what are they promised? What does this show about the transformative power of God?

10. What attitude is expressed in 33:2-6? How does 33:7-9 explain the reason for this? According to 33:10-22, what will God do about this? What lessons are here for us?

11. What does God reveal in 34:1-2? What result will this have in 34:3-7? According to 34:8-17, what will the outcome be? What is the point here?

12. What contrasting promise appears in 35:1-2? What encouragement do we see in 35:3-4? What's the connection here? What promises do we read in 35:5-10? What does this show about the purpose of God?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON EIGHT

5. How does God describe His people in 30:8-11? According to 30:12-14, what will this cause? In 30:15, what does God say? According to 30:16, how do the people answer Him? According to 30:16-17, to what will this lead? What does this reveal about the word of the Lord?

6. How is God described in 30:18? According to 30:19-22, what effect will this have on religious instruction? In 30:23-26, what effect will it have on the land? According to 30:27-33, what effect will it have on the nations? What does this show about waiting on the Lord?

7. What does God say about Egypt in 31:1-3? What does He say about Himself in 31:4-5? In 31:6-7, what does He encourage? According to 31:8-9, what will come from this? How is this text different from 30:1-7? Why?

8. What does God predict in 32:1-2? According to 32:3-8, what results will this have? What does this reveal about one of the main spiritual problems God's people can have?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON FIVE

9. According to 4:2, what will happen? In 4:3-4, what does God say will happen to His people? According to 4:5-6, what else will God do? What is this about? Where else do these concepts appear in Scripture? What is Isaiah trying to show us?

10. What situation does God describe in 5:1-2? In 5:3-4, what does He ask? In 5:5-6, what does He reveal? How does He explain this parable in 5:7? Where else do we see these concepts? Why is this important?

11. What problem does Isaiah bring up in 5:8? According to 5:9-10, how will God solve the problem? What problem appears in 5:11-12? What solution for this problem does 5:13-17 reveal? What does this tell us about the glorification of God?

12. What problems are condemned in 5:18-23? According to 5:24-25, what will the solution be? According to 5:26-30, how will this solution be specifically accomplished? How can we apply this context today?



WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY?

Lesson Six: Isaiah 6-12

THE MESSIAH

Of all of the books of prophecy, none is so central to the message of the New Testament as the book of Isaiah. From the moment when Isaiah accepts the commission of the Lord in the throne scene of Isaiah 6, it becomes apparent that he does not merely proclaim the restoration of God's kingdom, as other prophets before him had done. Instead, he also proclaims the One who will restore it.

Even if we put aside everything we know about the New Testament and do our best to read Isaiah as the people of his time would have read him, it's obvious that something strange is going on. Even in these few chapters, Isaiah predicts that a virgin will bear a child whose name will be "God with us",

that a son will be given who will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, and Everlasting Father, and that a Branch from the root of Jesse will be anointed with the fullness of the Spirit of God and bring all the nations to Him.

These prophecies don't predict King David II. They predict someone who is going to be far, far more, someone who is going to be God Himself. To the monotheistic Jews, this would have seemed incomprehensible and indeed blasphemous, yet it was what God's inspired prophet foretold. From the beginning, Jesus' disciples never presented Him merely as a wise teacher. Instead, to them, He was both Lord and Christ, the Anointed One whose divinity and reign were proclaimed by His resurrection from the dead.

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON EIGHT

1. What prediction does Isaiah offer in Isaiah 28:1-4? What contrasting prediction appears in 28:5-6? What problem is pointed out in 28:7-10? In 28:11-13, what solution does God promise? What does this show about the interaction between God and His people?
2. According to 28:14-15, what mistake have the people made? In 28:16-17, what is God's response? According to 28:17-22, what will the result be? What does this teach us about the dangers of scoffing?
3. What irony is explored in 29:11-12? What does this mean? What explanation for this is given in 29:13? According to 29:14, what is God going to do about it? What further irony appears in 29:15-16? How can understanding these things help us in our relationship with God?
4. According to 30:1-2, what mistake is Israel making? According to 30:3-7, what will the result be? How common is this problem for God's people in the Old Testament? Where can we have similar problems?



WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY?

Lesson Eight: Isaiah 28-35

SMOOTH THINGS

The more things change, the more they stay the same. In Isaiah 30:10, God condemns those “who say. . . to the prophets, ‘Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things.’” As the words of Isaiah and his contemporaries make clear, even under the leadership of Hezekiah, Judah was a nation with serious spiritual problems. However, many of the people of the land didn’t want to hear about their problems. Instead, they wanted prophets who would speak gently and offend no one rather than telling the truth.

The appetite of a people for smooth words seems to go hand in hand with its delight in wickedness, so it is hardly surprising that those who speak smoothly are

quite popular in modern-day America. This smoothness doesn’t have anything to do with delivery but with content. They preach a gospel that has all the harshness of cream soda, lest they alienate some of their followers. They dwell on the soothing generalities of the word while ignoring the barbed specifics.

Jesus Himself, by contrast, never had any interest in preaching smooth things. On one occasion, He began a sermon with an audience of thousands and concluded it with an audience of 12. His goal was to tell others what they needed to hear, not what they wanted to hear, and if they weren’t interested in the truth, too bad. If we are truly disciples of His, we will hunger not for smooth sayings, but for the word of the Lord.

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON SIX

1. According to Isaiah 6:1, when do the following events take place? In 6:1-4, what scene is described? According to 6:4, how does Isaiah react? What does this show us about the majesty of God?
2. In 6:6-7, what solution does God provide? In 6:8, how does Isaiah react? According to 6:8-10, what message should he bear? According to 6:11-13, how long should he bear it? What does this reveal about service to the Lord?
3. According to 7:1, what is the setting for this new context? What does 7:1-2 reveal about Judah’s situation? According to 7:3, what is Isaiah supposed to do? According to 7:4-9, what is God’s message? What does this teach us?
4. What exchange takes place in 7:10-12? In 7:13-17, what sign does God provide? According to 7:18-23, what other things will take place at this time? What are we to make of this?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON SIX

5. What events take place in 8:1-4? In 8:5-8, what explanation is given of these events? What warning appears in 8:9-10? What does this teach us about God?
6. What warning does God give in 8:11-12? According to 8:13, what is Isaiah supposed to do instead? According to 8:14-15, what will God become? Does any of this sound familiar? What application(s) should we make today?
7. What prediction appears in 9:1? In 9:2-5, what further details are provided? In 9:6-7, what explanation is given? What is significant about this prophecy?
8. What attitude is described in 9:8-10? According to 9:11-12, what will happen to this attempt? What problem appears in 9:13? In 9:14-17, what happened as a result? What does this show us about continuing in wickedness?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON SEVEN

9. What three promises appear in 25:6-8? Does any of this sound familiar? Why? According to 25:9, what will the reaction of His people be? What does this teach us about God?
10. Describe the song predicted in 26:1-4. What apparently contrasting thing has God done in 26:5-6? What attribute of God is explored in 26:7-9? In 26:10-11, what is urged on God? Why? What do these things show about God?
11. What comparison is made in 26:12-15? How are the capabilities of each described in 26:16-19? What recommendation does Isaiah offer in 26:20-21? What here is useful for us to remember?
12. What action of God is presented in 27:1? What subject is addressed in 27:2-6? How is this different from the presentation of the same subject in Isaiah 5? What does this show us about the nature of God's chastisement?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON SEVEN

5. What event is predicted in 22:5-8? What precautions against this event do 22:8-11 describe? According to 22:11-13, what precaution was overlooked? According to 22:14, what will the outcome of this be? What does this show us about planning for the future?

6. Who is the subject of 22:15? According to 22:16, what has he done? According to 22:17-19, what will happen to him? As per 22:20, who will his replacement be? In 22:21-22, how is this replacement described? Who likes to use this passage? What do they use it for? How do we deal with this?

7. What summary appears in 24:1? According to 24:2-3, what will the extent of the devastation be? How does 24:4-13 describe its effects? What else do we learn from 24:21-23? What does this reveal to us about God?

8. What sentiment does 25:1 express? How is this explained in 25:2-3? What other explanation is given in 25:4-5? What does this tell us about God's good works?

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON SIX

9. In 10:5-6, what has God done? According to 10:7-14, how has Assyria taken this? In 10:15-19, how does God answer Assyria? What does this show us about the purpose of God?

10. What promise does God make in 10:20-23? In what way is this a bad thing? In what way is this a good thing? What does God urge in 10:24? In 10:25-27, how does He explain Himself? What should we learn from this?

11. What promise appears in 11:1? In 11:2-5, how is this branch described? According to 11:6-10, what result will this have? Where else do we see this passage? Why is it important?

12. What saying is predicted in 12:1-2? According to 12:3-4, what will the people do? In 12:5-6, what else will they say? What can we take from this?



WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY?

Lesson Seven: Isaiah 13-27

GOD'S JUDGMENT

This section of Isaiah, especially chapters 13 through 24, carries with it an almost laundry-list feel. In effect, God says, "These are the bad things that are going to happen to this nation, and this nation, and this nation, and . . ." God's people are not exempted, but neither are the peoples around them. It doesn't make for particularly cheerful reading.

What it does do, though, even 2700 years after these words were originally penned, is give us an important reminder of the all-encompassing justice of God. God wasn't only concerned with handing out goodies to His people when they obeyed Him. Instead, He was equally concerned with their chastisement when they forsook Him.

Likewise, He didn't devote Himself to a myopic concern with Israel and Judah. Instead, He was determined to judge the nations of the whole region, and by extension the nations of the world.

When God has been so gracious to us in paying the debt of our sin with the blood of His Son, it is easy for us to focus on His mercy at the expense of His justice. In reality, of course, without His justice, His mercy is incoherent. If God does not reveal His wrath against all unrighteousness, then from what, exactly, does Jesus save us? If our sins are no big deal, then forgiveness of sins can't be a big deal either. It is sobering to consider the perfect judgments of the Lord and the penalties that He exacts, but only as we do so can we truly appreciate our salvation.

WHO CAN BUT PROPHECY: LESSON SEVEN

1. According to Isaiah 13:1, who is the subject of this oracle? What does 13:4-8 predict for them? According to 13:17-22, what will the fate of the city be? How accurate was this prediction?
2. Who is the subject of 14:3-4? In 14:12-14, how is he described? To whom is this text commonly applied? Is there any textual evidence in support of this application? According to 14:15-21, what will happen to this person? What does this tell us about Biblical interpretation?
3. What nations are mentioned in 14:25, 14:28, 15:1, 17:1, 17:4, 18:1, 19:1, 21:16, and 23:1-2? How is this explained in 14:26-27? What does this reveal about God and the nations?
4. In 20:1, what happens? In 20:2, what does God command? In 20:3-6, what explanation does He give? What does this show us about what being a prophet was like?