

Lesson 25: Decline of the Kingdom

(Note: Leave pages 29, 31, 33, 35 as loose sheets.)

Previously...

During the time of the Judges, as Israel settled into the Promised Land, the Bible records that as a nation, the people rebelled against God.

Then during the period of the kings, the Bible shows that Israel's leaders too, were overall rebellious towards Him.

Because King Solomon, the last king of the unified kingdom, rebelled against Yahweh, God tore the kingdom into two: the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

Both kingdoms were supposed to worship Yahweh as God.

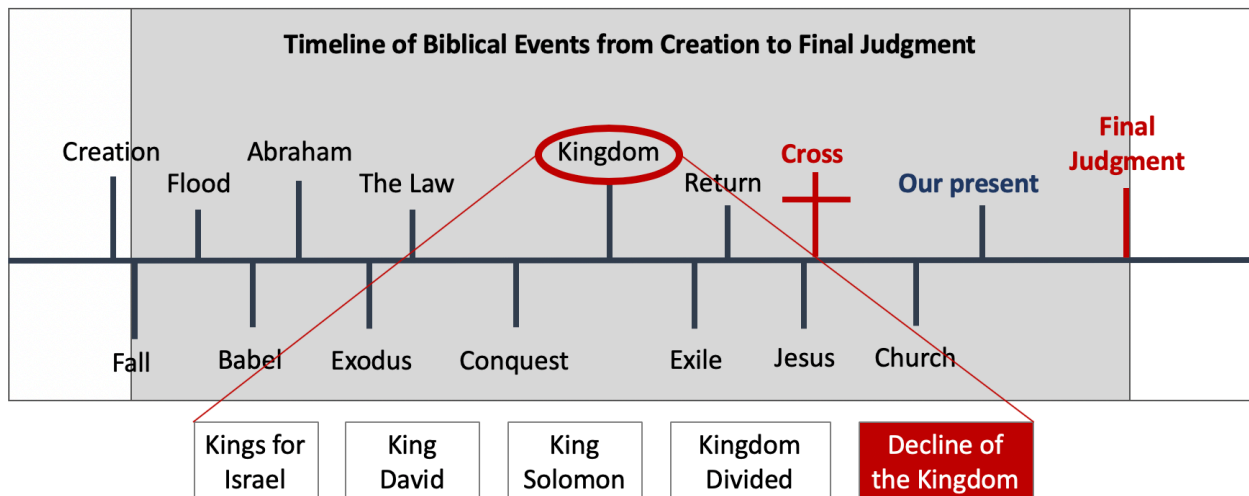
But instead, they had more bad than good kings in their history, leading both Israel and Judah to become paganised.

Whether it was the common man or kings and leaders, the Bible records that most were rebellious towards God.

So both kingdoms went into decline.

Kingdom of God	
Based on GRACE God would save man	
Election	
	God chose Abraham
	God saved Israel
	God built Israel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Law ▪ National anthem ▪ Temple worship ▪ Feasts & festivals
	Conquest and Settlement in the Promised Land
	Kings in Israel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unified kingdom ▪ Divided kingdom
↓	↓
Israel and Judah turned against God: Paganised—unbelievers	Few believers
 Brought in man's ideas	
 Made the king and state all-powerful	
 Worshipped idols	

Grey shows paganisation



The Prophets

During this period, God did not leave the kings alone. God used prophets to speak to them to encourage change.

There were 16 prophets who wrote the books of the Prophets. (See page 29.)

- Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, are known as “major prophets” because they wrote a lot.
- Daniel was also a prophet but did not hold that office in Israel. In the Hebrew Scriptures, he is listed in the Writings section.
- The other 12 are known as “minor prophets” because they wrote less.



During the period of the kings, the prophets were active in both Israel and Judah.

The books of the prophets make up 17 books in the Bible, even more than the Gospel accounts which only make up four books in the New Testament! So the message of the prophets must have been very important.

But what was the job that God gave them? What did they do and what did they write about? First, we need to understand some background.

What was happening at this time in history? God’s Discipline

Both Israel and Judah were rebellious and did not keep the terms of the Sinaitic Covenant. As God warned, this would lead to increasing levels of cursings (Deuteronomy 28:15–68; Leviticus 26:14–39). So during this period, God’s cursings got worse and worse.

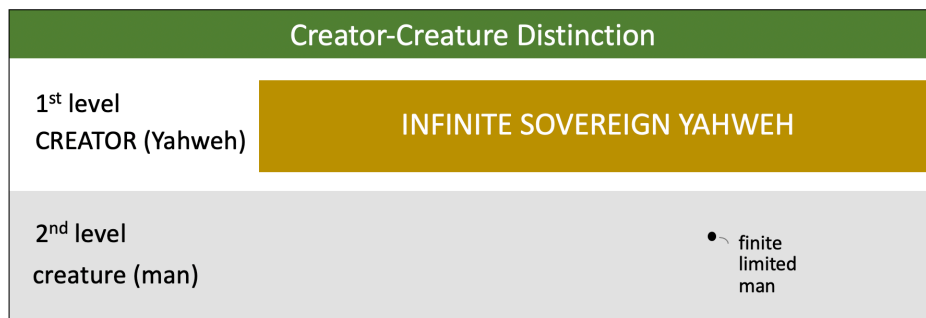
 Blessings for keeping the covenant	 Cursings for breaking the covenant
Leviticus 26:1–13 (also Deuteronomy 28:1–14)	Leviticus 26:14–46 (also Deuteronomy 28:15–68)
Blessings include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic prosperity, good weather and cooperative nature (v4–5) • Military success and peace (v6–8) • Population growth (v9) • God’s continued presence with them (v11–12) 	5 Stages of disciplines or cursings: <p>Stage 1: Disease and sickness (physical and psychological), military defeat, economic disaster (v14–17)</p> <p>Stage 2: Famine (v18–20)</p> <p>Stage 3: Death of children and livestock, population decrease (v21–22)</p> <p>Stage 4: Starvation, epidemics, crushing military defeat (v23–26)</p> <p>Stage 5: Cannibalism, death, enemy invasion, exile, terror and psychological problems, God’s presence removed from them (v27–39)</p>

However, Yahweh’s goal was not to destroy them; His goal was to restore them to fellowship with Him as His obedient children. Because of God’s covenantal love towards His people, He was not going to allow them to degenerate unchecked and destroy themselves. Divine discipline is actually a sign of God’s election-love and great kindness.



The people’s main sin was that they had wrong ideas of who Yahweh really is.

CORRECT UNDERSTANDING OF YAHWEH

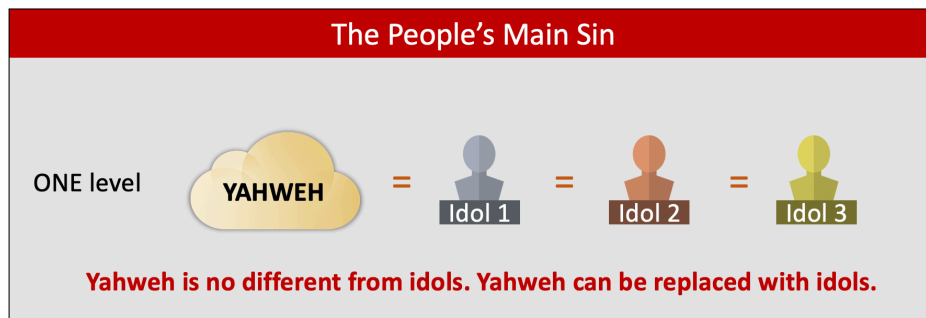


NOT 1st level and NOT 2nd level
Lifeless, breathless dead idols
made with human hands



Many behaved as if Yahweh were no different from any of the pagan gods. And so they replaced Him with idols and fake gods.

INCORRECT UNDERSTANDING OF YAHWEH



God’s plan for their suffering was for them to start questioning their wrong beliefs and hopefully return to their true God.

It was at this time of great suffering that God called prophets to speak to the people. But what were the prophets supposed to do?

The Job of the Prophets

Job of the Old Testament Prophets



A. God's Historians

The prophets as Yahweh's historians wrote the world's first analysis of the true meaning and purpose of history. God inspired them to interpret and record historical events from His all-knowing perspective. They explained what Yahweh was doing and why things were happening the way they were. God didn't want mankind to freely speculate on why history was turning out the way it did.



For example, if God sent an enemy to battle Israel because of their rebellion against Him, He didn't want people to look at that event and say that Israel was defeated because the enemy was stronger, their leader was smarter or that their god was more powerful. No, the sovereign Yahweh made the prophets write down the "behind-the-scenes" story of how He was orchestrating events and why.

Amos 3:7

Indeed, the Sovereign LORD never does anything until he reveals his plans to his servants the prophets.

But why would God bother to do that? This was because God made contracts with the nation of Israel. He wanted everyone to know how the parties of the contracts had behaved.

COVENANTS

Abrahamic	Mosaic
	
<p>Unconditional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land • Descendants • Worldwide blessing <p><i>Genesis 12:1-3</i></p>	<p>Conditional</p> <p>Blessings for obedience Cursings for rebellion</p> <p><i>Deuteronomy 28:1-68</i> <i>Leviticus 26:1-46</i></p>

Who would know if God actually kept His side of the agreement unless there were reports on God's behaviour?

The prophets were the ones who monitored and reported on God's and mankind's behaviour regarding the covenants between them.

Based on their records, the characters of the two parties would reveal that:

- God is ever faithful and sovereign while
- man is ever sinful.



B. God's Prosecuting Attorneys or Lawyers

The prophets were also God's lawyers. When the people broke their contract with Yahweh, the prophets acted like prosecuting attorneys and announced what wrong the people had done and how they broke the contract.



C. God's Scripture Writers

Aside from recording and writing down God's interpretation of history, God also gave the prophets new information to record in Scripture. Importantly, nothing the prophets wrote contradicted with what God had given in the Law or in previous revelations.

What the prophets were not

Some people believe the prophets were social reformers and early-day revolutionists. They were not. The prophets did not create:

- any new laws or
- social standards.



Rather, they reacted to how mankind behaved, based on the laws that God had already given.

The Message of the Prophets

Many prophets are mentioned in Scripture aside from the prophets who wrote the books of the Bible.

Some ministered in the north and others in the south. Each one wrote and expressed the message in their own unique style under God's guidance.

However, these two themes of cursing and promises are included in many of their messages.

The Message of the Prophets

1

Curses



Tell people that they broke the **Mosaic Covenant** and God is sending curses against them.

2

Promises



Remind people that all of God's **Abrahamic Covenant** promises will come true in the future Kingdom of God.



I. Curses

The prophets told the people they were suffering because they broke the Mosaic Covenant. They made it very clear that their suffering was not random.

- Yahweh was in full control of their discipline when He intentionally caused nature to work against them and directed wicked enemies like Syria and Assyria to defeat them.
- God was also proving that He wasn't just the ruler of Israel and Judah, but of all pagan nations as well; all had to submit to His will.



God wanted Israel to know that He was in full control of the rod that He used to spank them.

This is what God said to the Assyrians through the prophet Isaiah when they defeated Israel:

Isaiah 37:26–27a

²⁶ “But have you not heard?

I decided this long ago.

Long ago I planned it,
and now I am making it happen.

I planned for you to crush fortified cities
into heaps of rubble.

²⁷ That is why their people have so little power
and are so frightened and confused.

God caused Assyria to crush Israel! Assyria did not defeat Israel because of their own might!

But why did Yahweh want Israel to know that He was causing their defeat?

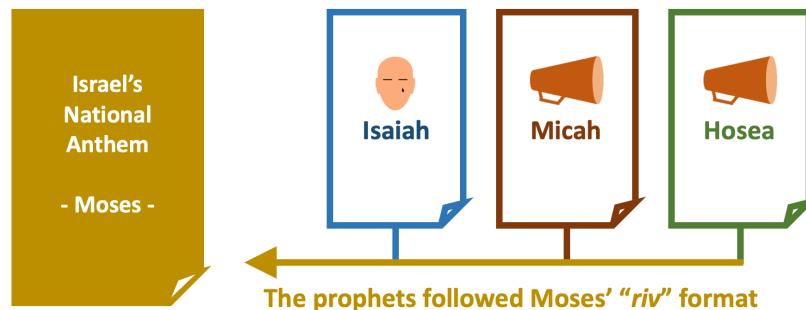
- He was encouraging them to repent. Yahweh's discipline was intended to help them turn from their wicked ways.
- Also, it was to help them bear with suffering. If they understood that they were still God's people and He was still in charge, they would know there was a purpose to their hardship and pain.



Unfortunately, while God intended their suffering to help them repent, the people did not.

How did the prophets communicate the cursing message to the people?

The prophets wrote this cursing message following the format that Moses had used earlier in writing Israel's national anthem (Deuteronomy 32).



What format did Moses use in writing the national anthem?

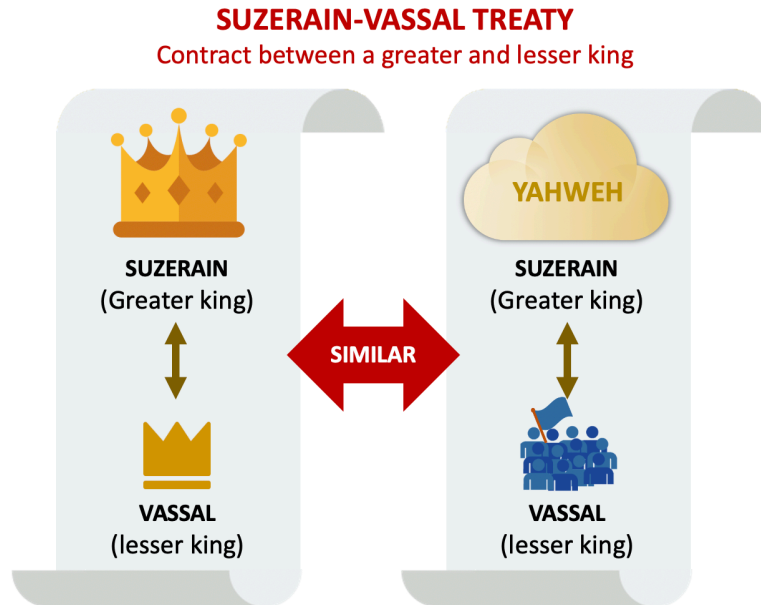
Moses used the “*riv*” (pronounced “REEV”) format.

Historically, it was common for stronger, more powerful kings (the suzerain) to make treaties with kings of weaker and lesser nations (the vassal).

The terms of agreement would cover:

- what each party would do for each other as well as
- penalties if one party violated the covenant.

Interestingly, in some ways, this suzerain-vassal treaty is similar to the Mosaic Covenant that Yahweh made with the 12 tribes of Israel, where Yahweh could be seen as the suzerain and Israel could be seen as the vassal.



Towards the end of his life, God warned Moses that the Israelites would rebel against Him (Deuteronomy 31:16–30) and break their side of the Mosaic contract.

Knowing that, when Moses composed Israel's national anthem (also called the "Song of Moses"), he structured it like a "*riv*". (In English Bibles, "*riv*" is sometimes translated as "complaint" [Micah 6:2] or "charge" [Hosea 4:1].)

"Riv":
Lawsuit or Complaint used when
Vassal breaks treaty with Suzerain

But what is a "*riv*"? It is a special lawsuit used in the ancient Near East when a lesser king (vassal king) breaks a treaty with a greater king (suzerain). Lawyers also use this format when charging the accused in court.

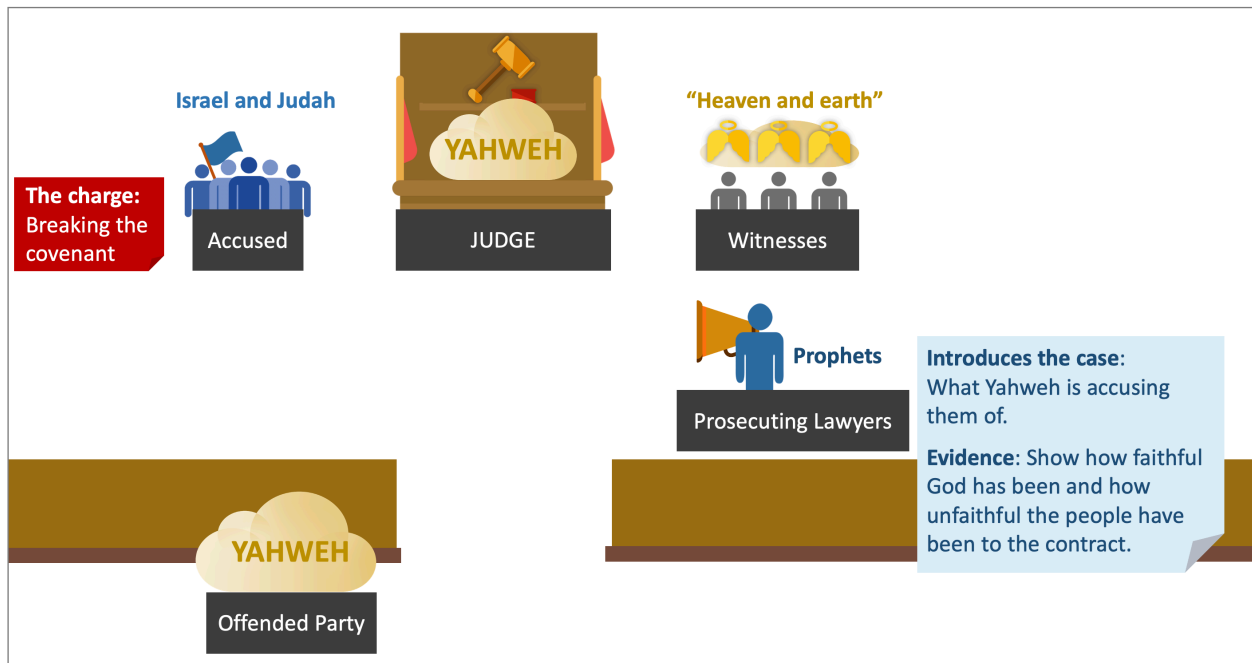
Following Moses' use of the "*riv*" format, the prophets also used the "*riv*" to explain the cursing to the people.

However, each prophet wrote in the context of their own generation and political situation and in their own personal style of writing.

To help us better understand the books of the prophets, we will look at examples of how Isaiah, Hosea and Micah wrote about God's cursing (following Moses' format) and how they convinced Israel that they had broken the Mosaic Covenant.

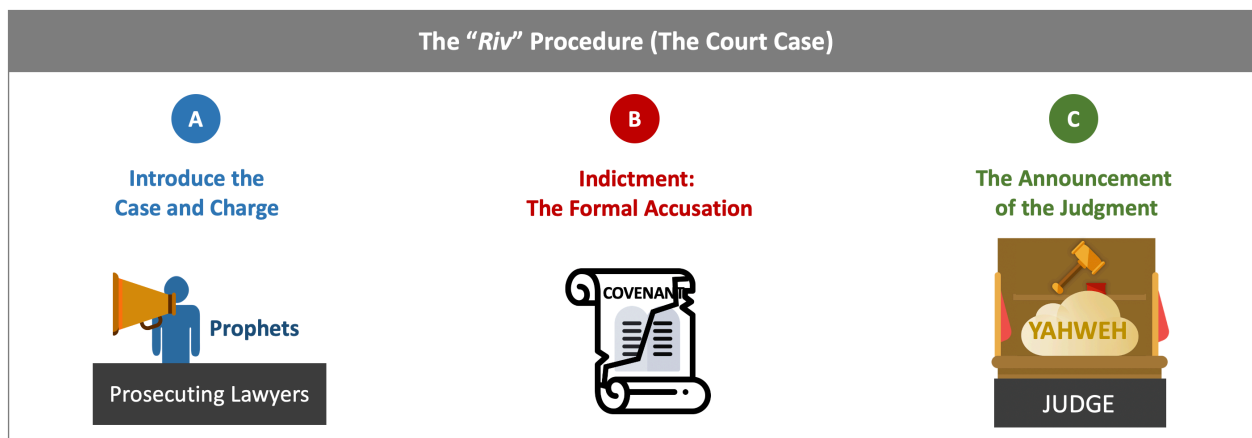


The Different Parties in the “Riv” Lawsuit



The “Riv” Procedure

(Lay out pages 31, 33, 35 in front of you.)





A. Introduce the Case and Charge

The lawsuit starts with Yahweh bringing the charge against His people.

Witnesses

- Through the prophets (prosecuting lawyers), God calls on “heaven and earth” (the witnesses).
- Refer to the **BLUE** sections.
- Read **Deuteronomy 32:1**. In Moses’ national anthem, the witnesses that God calls on are the heavens and the earth. What He is asking for are the angels and spirit beings (“heavens”) and other nations and humans (“earth”) to be the witnesses of the contract and the breaking of it.
- Read **Isaiah 1:2a**, **Micah 6:1**. Likewise, following Moses’ example, the prophets call on their witnesses, the heaven, mountains, hills: the same witnesses that Moses called on.

Introduces the case and the evidence

- Read **Deuteronomy 32:1–14**. Try and identify:
 - (i) the charge
 - (ii) the evidence of God’s behaviour and
 - (iii) the evidence of Israel’s behaviour.
- The charge: God is faithful but the people have acted corruptly towards Him.
- The evidence: God rescued them from Egypt, took them as His own children, protected them and gave them land; but they were perverse, deceitful and twisted and they did not behave at all like His children.
- Read **Isaiah 1:2–4**, **Hosea 4:1**, **Micah 6:1–4**. Similarly, identify the charges.



B. The Indictment (Formal written statement containing the accusation)

- The indictment points to the parts of the contract that have been broken.
- Refer to the **RED** sections.
- Read **Deuteronomy 32:15–18**. Identify which of the Mosaic laws the people had broken.
- In the Deuteronomy passage, the people violated the first commandment which says they are to have no other gods besides Yahweh (Exodus 20:3).
- The Mosaic law contains 613 laws that the people had agreed to keep. Many of the indictments also included the symptoms of not having Yahweh as their God.
- Read **Isaiah 1:11–15**, **21–23**, **Hosea 4:2**, **Micah 6:10–12**. What laws did the people break?



C. The Announcement of the Judgment

- Finally, the judgment calls out what God would do because they had broken the covenant. God had warned the people that there were five levels of curses for violating the contract, each level of cursing being worse than the one before (Deuteronomy 28:15–68; Leviticus 26:14–39).
- Now refer to the **GREEN** sections.
- Read **Deuteronomy** 32:19–26. Identify the punishment or the curses.
- The cursing was very frightening indeed! God would abandon them and make them jealous by focusing on the Gentiles instead. He would heap all kinds of disasters on them: sickness, terminal diseases, starvation, attack by wild animals, military defeat and psychological problems!
- Read **Isaiah** 1:24–31, **Hosea** 4:3, **Micah** 6:13–15 for the judgments God announced against the people.

Yahweh was very serious about the contracts He had with His people. He was faithful to His promises and He expected His people to also take seriously their commitments to Him.

Many of the prophets would:

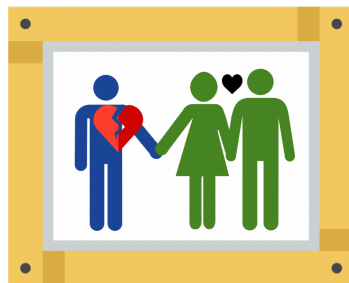
- charge the people of breaking the law and then
- announce the level of cursing that God would bring.

Yahweh did this to make the people reconsider their rebellion and turn to Him in repentance.

Symbolic actions and carefully designed personal trials

But God did more than send the prophets to announce the curses. He also put some of the prophets through carefully designed personal trials or instructed them to do certain symbolic actions to communicate His message. For example:

- **Hosea:** God told Hosea to marry a prostitute who would commit adultery. He wanted Hosea to experience deep pain and hurt over his unfaithful wife's betrayal. Why? Only when Hosea lived through it himself could he better communicate and write about what God was experiencing: God's utter disgust and grief over Israel's disloyalty to Him (Hosea 1:2–3, 3:5).



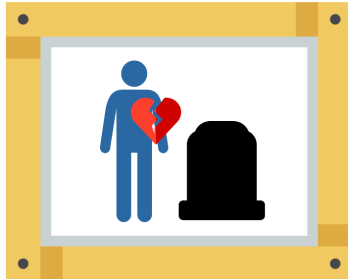
Hosea's adulterous wife...

...is a picture of...

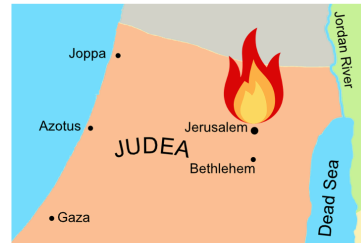


...adulterous Israel

- **Ezekiel:** God told Ezekiel He would take away his wife’s life. But when she died, even though he would be heartbroken, God would not allow him to cry or mourn for his loss. The death of Ezekiel’s wife, who was the “delight of his eyes” symbolised the coming destruction of Jerusalem, the city which was the delight of the Israelites’ eyes.



The death of Ezekiel’s wife
who was the delight of his eyes...



...the destruction of Jerusalem,
the delight of Israel’s eyes

...is a picture of...

The tragedy of Jerusalem’s destruction would be so terrible that any public expression of grief would be inadequate and insignificant to the scale of the tragedy; instead, the people would just rot away in their sins and groan to each other (Ezekiel 24:15–27).

How did the people of Israel and Judah respond to the prophets?

They responded badly. The prophets were not popular. All of them wrote to people who were suffering, hungry, poor and defeated in war by their enemies. And people did not want to hear their “negative” message.

Prophet after prophet would tell the people they broke the Sinaitic Covenant and encourage the people to turn back to Yahweh. But the people never had any permanent repentance. They remained rebellious and hard-hearted towards God.



The consequences: God “divorced” His nation, Israel.

What did breaking the Sinaitic Covenant mean for the people? It meant they could no longer expect God to bless them or protect them!

By charging His people with the lawsuit, God was saying that they did not deserve to have any further relationship with Him and God was no longer obligated to care for them! (Jeremiah 3:6–10.)

The Israelites had “torn up the contract”, so to speak! The conditional agreement was over.



So God carried out the fifth and final level of cursing that He had warned them about: exile.

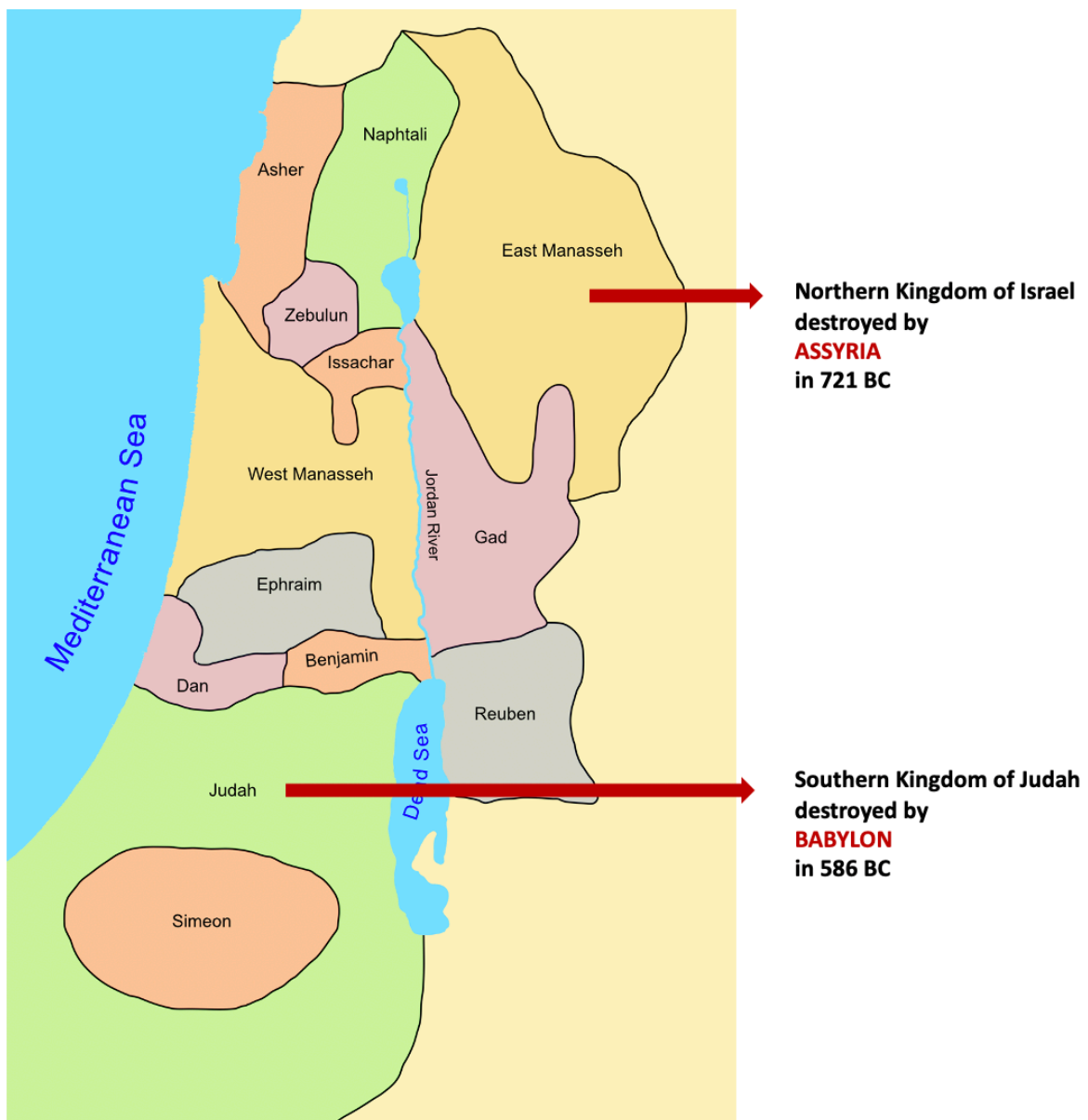
The prophets watched as Israel fell to the Assyrians in 721 BC. They were destroyed after:

- 200 years and
- nine different dynasties.

The prophets also watched as Judah fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC. They lasted:

- 400 years with
- one dynasty, David's line.

The people were scattered from their homeland and were no longer a free nation.



The Bible’s Commentary on the Mosaic Law and the Curses

The Mosaic law failed to make the people righteous. Just having the law did not mean the people were able to keep it.

Even the curses did not change their rebellious hearts.



Through their own effort, mankind could not obey the Word of God, not the common man nor kings nor leaders. All failed.

The law proved time and again that mankind was completely sinful. Only God was ever faithful.

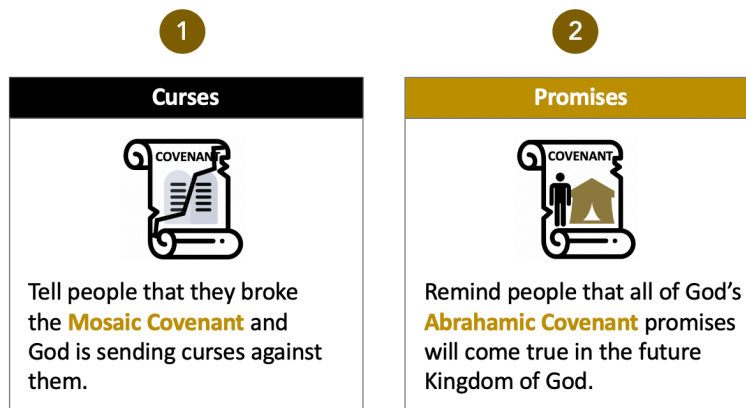
If YAHWEH were to make His people righteous, He would have to do it another way.



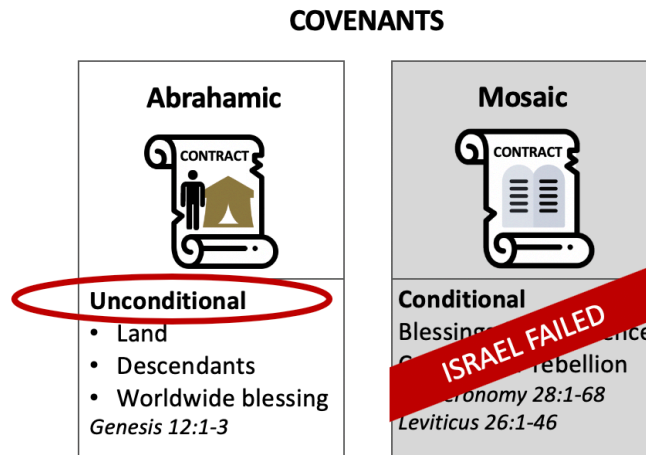
II. Promises

If the message of the curses were all the prophets talked and wrote about, Israel would be depressed and hopeless. But God led the prophets to communicate another very important message to the people. The prophets reminded the people of God’s promises.

The Message of the Prophets



Though the Israelites completely failed to keep the conditional Mosaic Covenant, God never forgot His UNCONDITIONAL promises in the Abrahamic Covenant. And He fully intended to deliver on all of them. Israel did not need to do a thing.



More than 1000 years earlier, God had chosen Abraham out of everyone on earth and promised him:

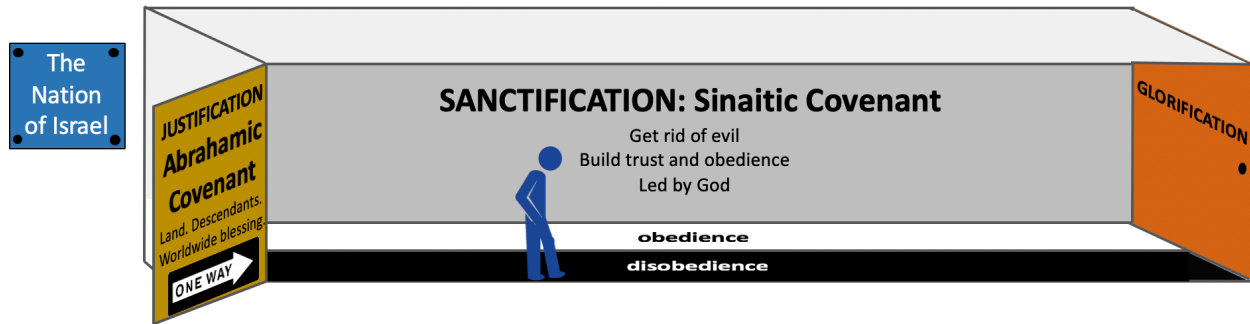
- (i) land
- (ii) descendants and
- (iii) that through him would come a worldwide blessing.

Through Abraham and his family, the Israelites, God was going to preserve His history and truth and point mankind towards Him.



In order to keep these unconditional promises, Yahweh, the promise-keeping and faithful God, would never destroy the Israelites totally. And He wanted His people to know that.

Even though the nation of Israel was suffering through a very difficult period of punishment and discipline (Israel's sanctification journey), God sent prophets to remind the nation of His unconditional promises in the Abrahamic Covenant (which is a picture of justification). This was to give Israel hope.



This is why even in Moses' national anthem, the "riv" or structure of the lawsuit ended very suddenly and then it becomes very "un-riv" like.

After the announcement of the judgment, God said that despite their sins, He would not totally eliminate the Israelites but would in fact restore them in the future! This is what God said:

Deuteronomy 32:26–27, 36

- ²⁶ I would have annihilated them,
wiping out even the memory of them.
- ²⁷ But I feared the taunt of Israel's enemy,
who might misunderstand and say,
"Our own power has triumphed!
The LORD had nothing to do with this!"
- ³⁶ "Indeed, the LORD will give justice to his people,
and he will change his mind about his servants,
when he sees their strength is gone
and no one is left, slave or free.

God explained that He would not eliminate the Israelites despite their heinous sins against Him. Why?

- He did not want Israel's enemies to misunderstand what was really happening in history: God Himself was using them to punish His own people. He didn't want them to wrongly think that they had triumphed over Israel because of their own strength.
- More importantly, the reason God would not eliminate the Israelites but would restore them instead was because of the promises He had made to Abraham.



So the prophets recorded specific prophecies of what God would do in the future to fulfil all the promises He had made to Israel.



LAND

For example, Isaiah reaffirms God's promise of land.

Isaiah 14:1

But the LORD will have mercy on the descendants of Jacob. He will choose Israel as his special people once again. He will bring them back to settle once again in their own land. And people from many different nations will come and join them there and unite with the people of Israel.



DESCENDANTS

Amos writes about the time in the future when God would fulfil the promise of descendants in the Davidic Covenant.

Amos 9:11

"In that day I will restore the fallen house of David.
I will repair its damaged walls.
From the ruins I will rebuild it
and restore its former glory.

Isaiah also writes about one of David's special descendants: the coming Messiah, the promised Saviour that God had spoken about after the Fall.



Isaiah 11:1–2a

- ¹ Out of the stump of David's family will grow a shoot—
yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root.
² And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—



WORLDWIDE BLESSING

And Zechariah records that people all over the world will learn about Yahweh from the Jews and come to worship Him in Jerusalem. This is one way that the Jews will be a worldwide blessing.

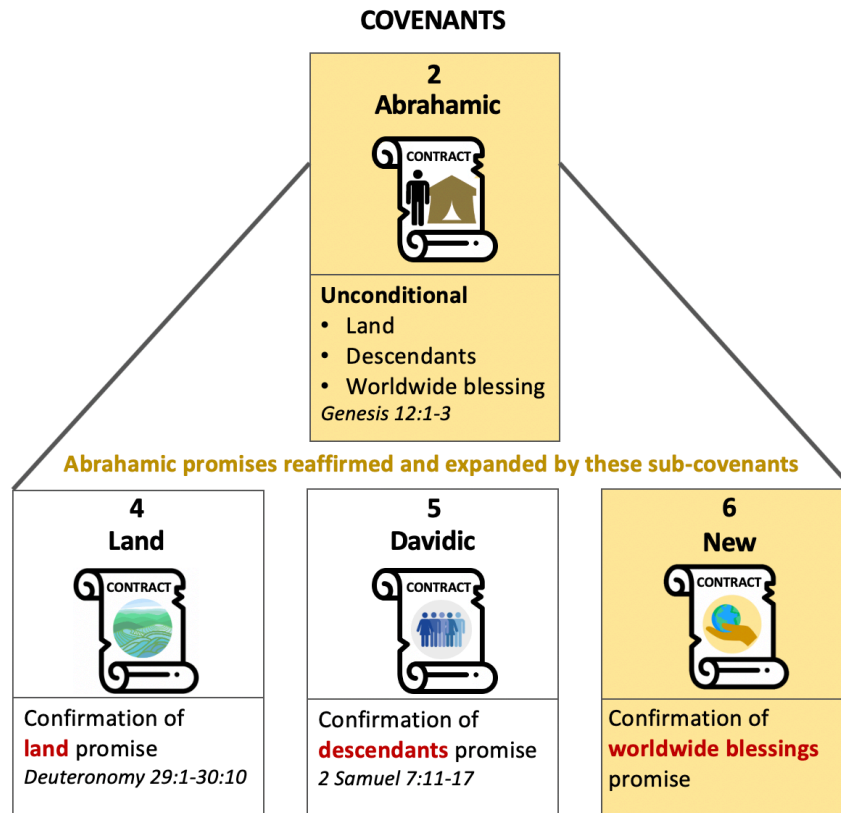
Zechariah 8:22–23

²² Many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD of Heaven's Armies and to ask for his blessing. ²³ "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: In those days ten men from different nations and languages of the world will clutch at the sleeve of one Jew. And they will say, 'Please let us walk with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'"

But what was even more amazing was that through the prophets, God gave details about another covenant that He would make with Israel and Judah.

The Israelites had tried for about 750 years to obey God's Mosaic Law with their own effort. And they had always failed. But now Yahweh Himself would give the nation of Israel permanent security, peace with Him, and righteousness.

However, it would not be through the Mosaic Covenant. Instead, through the prophets, Yahweh announced something new: the unconditional New Covenant!



The New Covenant

This was an upgraded, super-covenant that would cause the nation of Israel to become righteous! God would do for the people what they could not do for themselves!








This is what Yahweh said through the prophet Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 31:31–34, 38a, 40b

³¹ “The day is coming,” says the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. ³² This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant, though I loved them as a husband loves his wife,” says the LORD.

³³ “But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days,” says the LORD. “I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, ‘You should know the LORD.’ For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already,” says the LORD. “And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.” ³⁸ “The day is coming,” says the LORD, “when all Jerusalem will be rebuilt for me... ⁴⁰ The city will never again be captured or destroyed.”

This New Covenant that the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel wrote about gave the people a forward-looking hope. It told them Yahweh was going to do something to help deliver them from their own sinful natures and make them righteous! (We will discuss the New Covenant in greater detail in a future lesson.)

	 Abrahamic Covenant	 Land Sub-Covenant	 Davidic Sub-Covenant	 New Covenant (Sub-Covenant)
 Parties	God, Abraham and descendants	God and Israel	God, David and some of David's descendants	God, Israel and Judah
 Promises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land Descendants Worldwide blessing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Promised Land belongs to Israel Israel will possess the land forever 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The king will have a Father-Son relationship with Yahweh David's dynasty will be eternal David's dynasty will be in Jerusalem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> God will forgive their sins. God will change their hearts. God will regather all Israel to the Promised Land forever.
 Type	Unconditional	Unconditional	Unconditional	Unconditional


So on one hand, the prophets delivered the message of cursing, but on the other hand, they also delivered the message of great and certain hope!

God was severely disciplining His people at this point in history and had “divorced” Israel for breaking the Mosaic Covenant. However, He is ever-faithful and would “remarry” and restore Israel in the future. The prophets communicated this dual-track message.

Dual-Track Message of the Prophets

1


Curses



Tell people that they broke the **Mosaic Covenant** and God is sending curses against them.

2

Promises

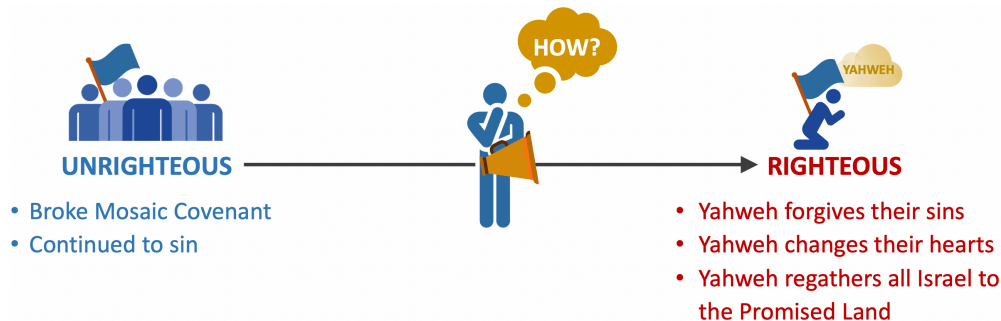


Remind people that all of God's **Abrahamic Covenant** promises will come true in the future Kingdom of God.

The Unresolved Mystery left by the Prophets

Even though the prophets communicated God’s message to the people, they were confused about the tension between Israel’s continued sin and how God’s election and promises would be fulfilled.

- How would the people go from discipline and suffering to finally receiving all of God’s promises? Who was involved in this change? How would it happen? When would it happen?
- How would the holy, righteous Yahweh reconcile the rebellious, sinful Israel to an everlasting fellowship with Himself?



It was all a mystery to them. In fact, the New Testament tells us that they searched, inquired and wondered about this mystery.

1 Peter 1:10–11

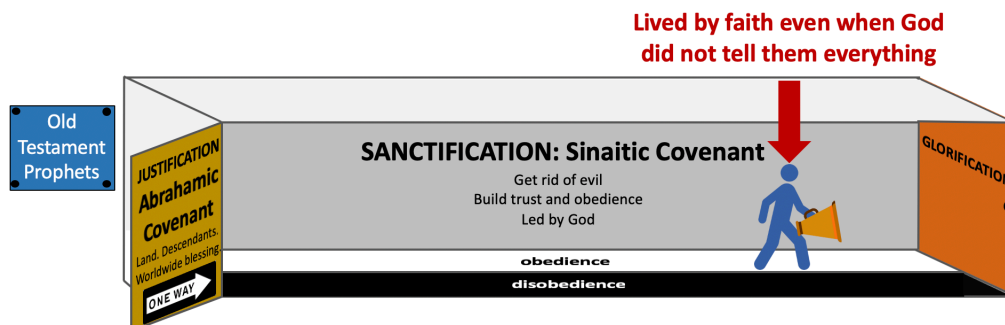
¹⁰ This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you. ¹¹ They wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ’s suffering and his great glory afterward.

The Bible tells us that they never found the answer in their lifetimes. God had kept it hidden from them.

Deuteronomy 29:29

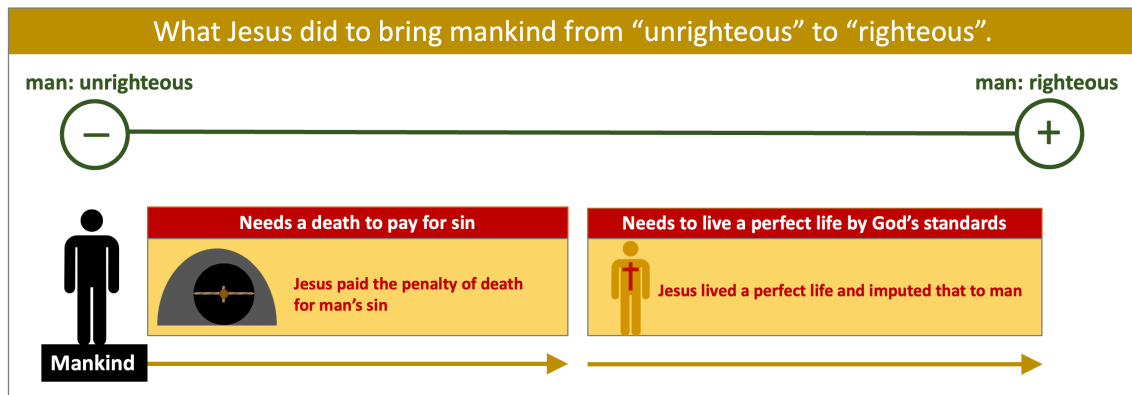
“The LORD our God has secrets known to no one. We are not accountable for them, but we and our children are accountable forever for all that he has revealed to us, so that we may obey all the terms of these instructions.

Because there were things the prophets did not know, the Old Testament believers therefore had to walk by faith with this big, unresolved mystery in their minds.



Mystery resolved in the New Testament through Jesus' life, death and resurrection

We now live many centuries after the Old Testament prophets. Reading from the New Testament, God revealed much more about how He resolved the mystery that the prophets had struggled with. The answer was in Messiah Jesus, God Himself coming as a man, living on earth, dying on the cross and then raising to life again.



We will not take the time to study this out now.

For now, it's enough to know it was Jesus who initiated the New Covenant for Israel. This is what Jesus said at the Last Supper before He was to be crucified.

Luke 22:20

After supper he took another cup of wine and said, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.



Jesus did it all. Man had no part to play in this incredible resolution. Jesus would live a perfectly righteous life and die for mankind's sin. He would initiate the New Covenant for Israel. In addition, His death on the cross would be the sin payment for anyone who trusts in Him. And He would credit or put His righteousness into every person who trusts in Him. We will come back and look at more details about this in a later lesson.

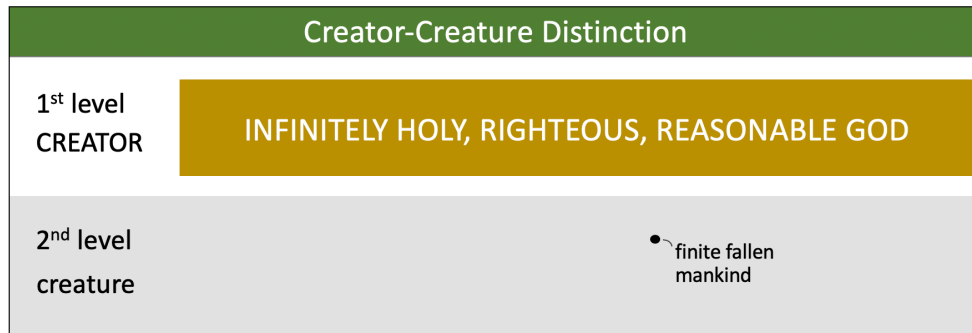
The Prophets are a Model for Us

How did the prophets manage to live with the unresolved mystery of how Yahweh was going to reconcile man to Himself? They did not have the answer. God hid it from them. Yet, they are a model for us who must also walk by faith with other unresolved mysteries.

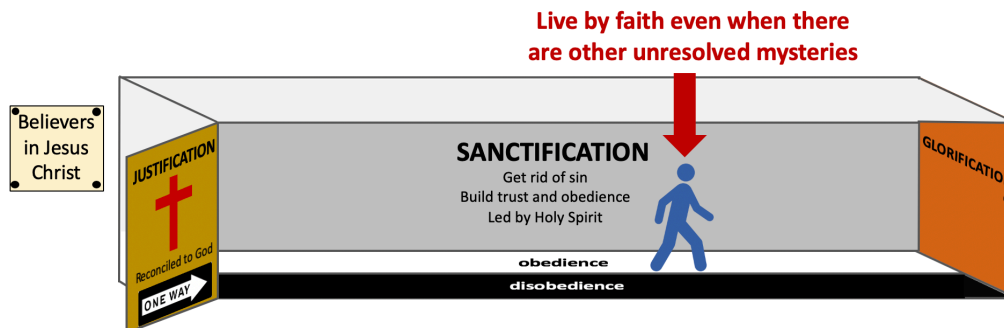
Indeed there are many other unresolved mysteries. For example, why did God create a universe where He knew people would sin? The only answer we have from the Bible is that God did it for His own glory. It may sound very unreasonable and harsh to us.

But we need to remember:

- First, God has an infinitely holy and righteous character.
- Second, God does not call us to an irrational faith. God will indeed answer our questions in a very rational, very understandable way in the future.



But, like the prophets, we now live at a time where we do not know the answer. So just like them, we should not “make things up” and create answers that God did not give.



From our point in history, we now know the answer to the prophets' mystery: Jesus Christ is the answer to how God can provide mankind righteousness. But the prophets did not know this. So they waited in faith by:

- First, trusting in God's character and the track record that they already knew.
- Second, humbly accepting there was more they didn't know about the mind of God.

Isaiah 40:28

Have you never heard?

Have you never understood?

The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of all the earth.

He never grows weak or weary.

No one can measure the depths of his understanding.

The Old Testament saints reasoned that God would do a new thing and solve the mystery. This is what Isaiah prophesied God saying:

Isaiah 43:19

For I am about to do something new.

See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?

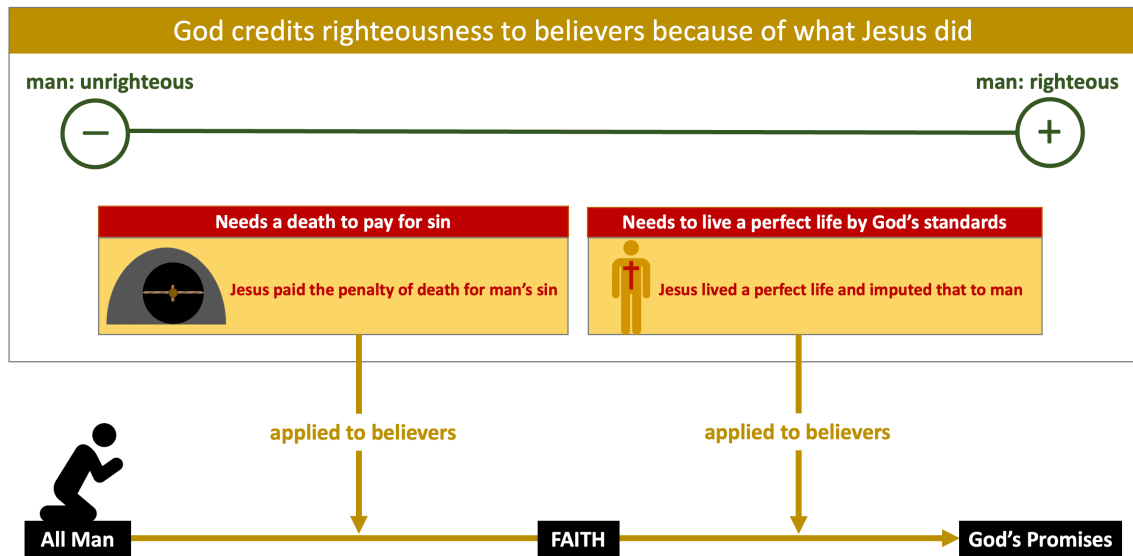
I will make a pathway through the wilderness.

I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.



God says that He will do this new thing. Yahweh, with His sovereign grace, will provide His people with the righteousness they need to receive His blessing. However, the people must trust Him in order to receive this righteousness.

- God has a responsibility: He will provide the righteousness.
- But man also has a responsibility: He must believe God.



Is the role of a prophet active in the church today?

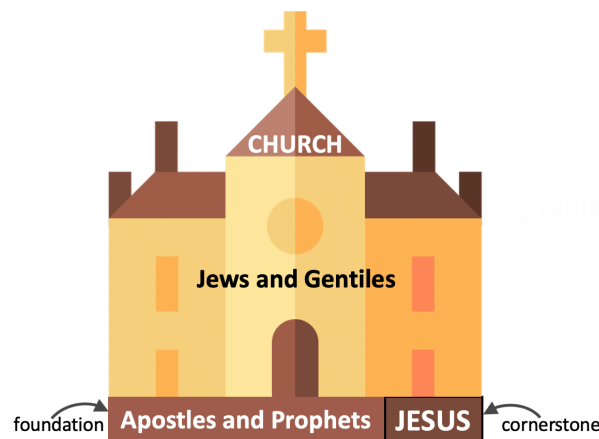
In Old Testament times, one key job of the prophets was to write Scripture as they were inspired by God. This was how the Old Testament was completed.

In New Testament times, God used prophets and apostles to write the New Testament. The Bible says that the prophets and the apostles are the foundation of the church:

Ephesians 2:14, 19–21

¹⁴ For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us.

¹⁹ So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. ²⁰ Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. ²¹ We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.



(Note: Historically, the cornerstone is the first foundation stone laid down. All other stones are set in reference to this stone.)

The job of the apostle and prophet was important for the early church because believers at that time did not have the completed Bible. So the apostles and prophets communicated messages from God and wrote the New Testament.

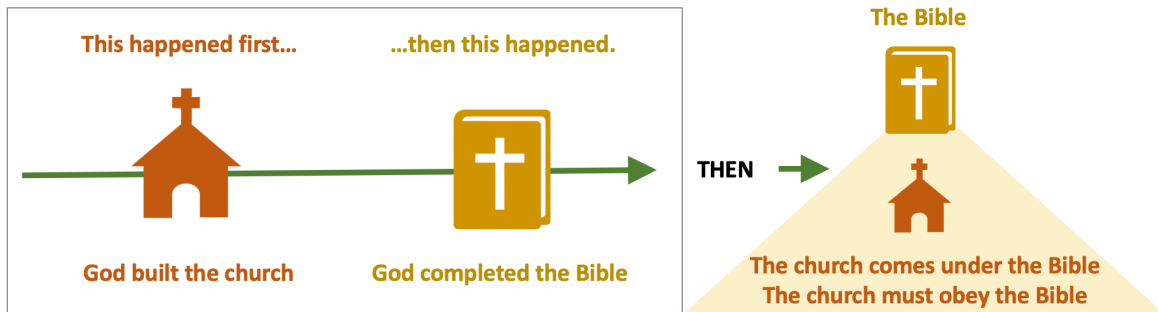
Ephesians 4:11–12

¹¹ Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹² Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.

However, once the entire Scriptures were completed, God pointed mankind to His written Word as the ultimate authority they should turn to.

2 Timothy 3:16–17

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. ¹⁷ God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.



Even Paul, who was a true apostle of God and one whom God used to write a large portion of the New Testament, pointed to Scripture as the ultimate authority.

For example, the people of Berea checked Paul's teaching against the Word of God.

Acts 17:10–12

¹⁰ That very night the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea. When they arrived there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth. ¹² As a result, many Jews believed, as did many of the prominent Greek women and men.

What's more, Paul warned believers that once God's revelation was completed, no one, human or spirit being, was allowed to add, take away or change God's Word. Not even Paul himself could change Scripture.

Galatians 1:8–9

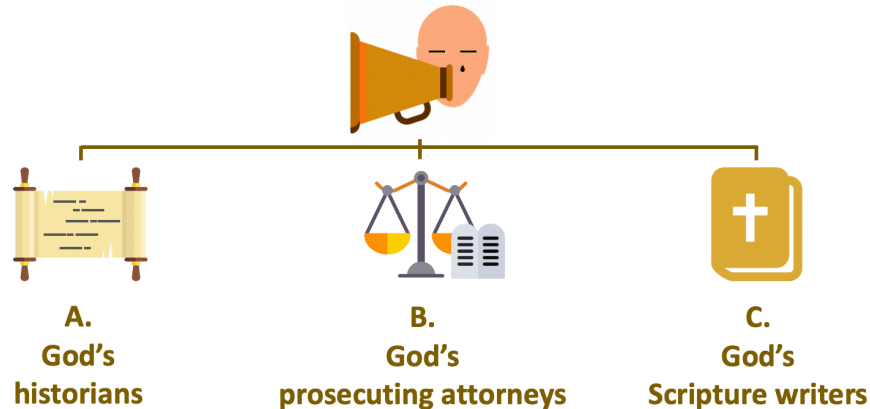
⁸ Let God's curse fall on anyone, including us or even an angel from heaven, who preaches a different kind of Good News than the one we preached to you. ⁹ I say again what we have said before: If anyone preaches any other Good News than the one you welcomed, let that person be cursed.



Now the question is: Are there true “prophets” in the church today?

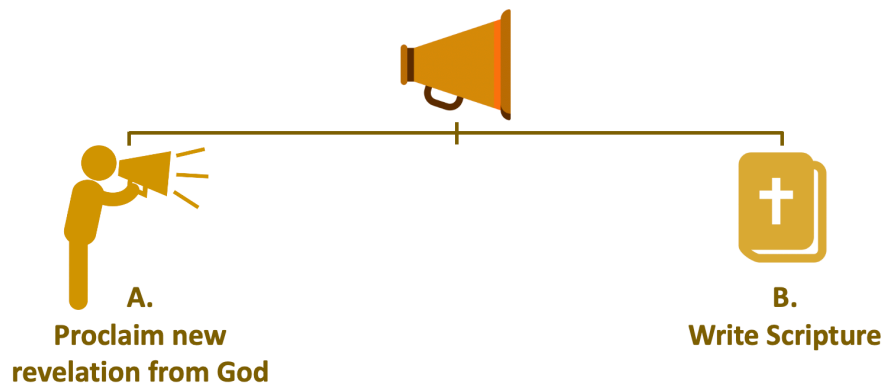
- If by “prophet”, we mean the Old Testament definition where they write Scripture, act as prosecuting attorneys and record history from God’s perspective, then the answer is no.

Job of the Old Testament Prophets



- If we mean the New Testament definition where they proclaim new revelation from God and write Scripture, the answer is again no.

Job of the New Testament Prophets



Once the canon of Scripture was closed, the job of the prophet to write Scripture ceased.

However:

- Does God reveal and remind believers of truth in the Bible? Yes.
- Does God cause believers to share His word of exhortation, encouragement and rebuke with others? Yes.
- Does God work in hearts to convict believers of sin and encourage repentance? Yes.
- Does God sometimes supernaturally disrupt our lives and intervene with miracles? Yes, He can and does at His will.

But we cannot call any of these the biblical gift of prophecy.

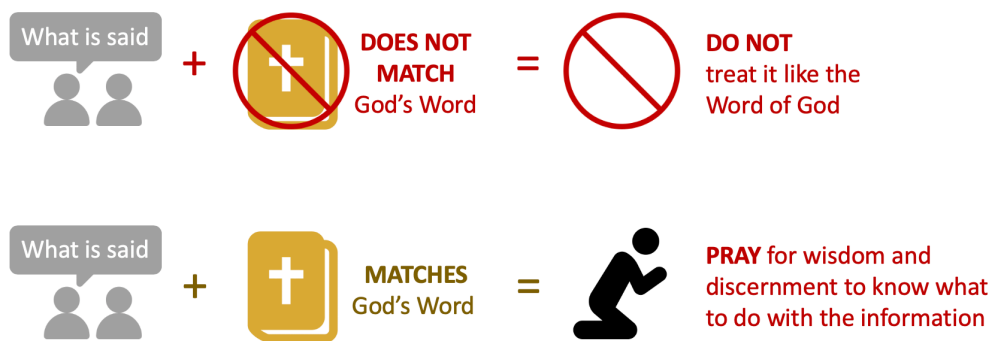
God reminds us of truths in the Bible	God leads us to exhort, encourage and rebuke fellow Christians	God works in our hearts to convict us of sin	God can choose to supernaturally disrupt our lives
			
But all these cannot be called the biblical gift of prophecy			

Regardless of whether a person is a pastor, preacher, Sunday school teacher or a self-proclaimed modern-day prophet, we need to always compare what is said with what the Bible says. It must be in total agreement with the Bible because God does not contradict Himself.

1 John 4:1

Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world.

- If what is said does not agree with the Bible, do not treat it like the word of God.
- If what is said agrees with the Bible, pray for wisdom and discernment on what to do with the information shared.



Paul himself treated the Bible as the ultimate authority and encouraged others to do likewise. We should heed his words and do the same.

Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions as a group or use them for personal reflection.

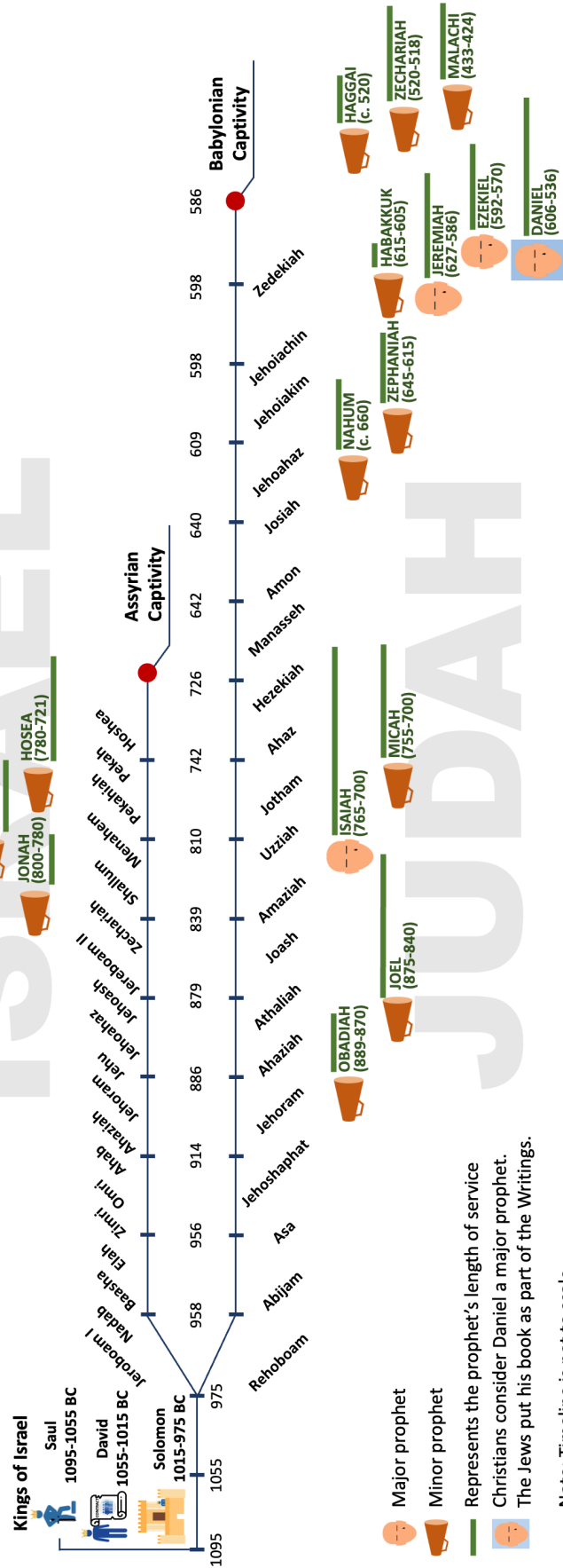
1. Yahweh held the Israelites accountable for the way they lived their lives. As a disciple of Christ (one who believes and follows Christ), how much do you think Christ monitors your life? Will He hold you accountable for the way you live?
2. When you learn or hear of new teaching about God or the Bible, how do you go about verifying if the information is accurate or true? What is your Bible study process like?
3. Learning from the example of Old Testament prophets, how should we handle questions or mysteries about life or its meaning that we can't seem to find an answer to?



Pre-reading for next lesson: Daniel 2, Ezekiel 8–11

Kings and Prophets

ISRAEL



This timeline is based on: Floyd Nolen Jones, *The Chronology of the Old Testament*. Master Books, 2005.

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Deuteronomy 32:1–26

¹ “Listen, O heavens, and I will speak!
Hear, O earth, the words that I say!

² Let my teaching fall on you like rain;
let my speech settle like dew.
Let my words fall like rain on tender grass,
like gentle showers on young plants.

³ I will proclaim the name of the LORD;
how glorious is our God!

⁴ He is the Rock; his deeds are perfect.
Everything he does is just and fair.
He is a faithful God who does no wrong;
how just and upright he is!

⁵ “But they have acted corruptly toward him;
when they act so perversely,
are they really his children?
They are a deceitful and twisted generation.

⁶ Is this the way you repay the LORD,
you foolish and senseless people?
Isn't he your Father who created you?
Has he not made you and established you?

⁷ Remember the days of long ago;
think about the generations past.
Ask your father, and he will inform you.
Inquire of your elders, and they will tell you.

⁸ When the Most High assigned lands to the nations,
when he divided up the human race,
he established the boundaries of the peoples
according to the number in his heavenly court.

⁹ “For the people of Israel belong to the LORD;
Jacob is his special possession.

¹⁰ He found them in a desert land,
in an empty, howling wasteland.
He surrounded them and watched over them;
he guarded them as he would guard his own eyes.

¹¹ Like an eagle that rouses her chicks
and hovers over her young,
so he spread his wings to take them up
and carried them safely on his pinions.

¹² The LORD alone guided them;
they followed no foreign gods.

¹³ He let them ride over the highlands
and feast on the crops of the fields.
He nourished them with honey from the rock
and olive oil from the stony ground.

¹⁴ He fed them yogurt from the herd
and milk from the flock,
together with the fat of lambs.
He gave them choice rams from Bashan, and goats,
together with the choicest wheat.

You drank the finest wine,
made from the juice of grapes.

¹⁵ “But Israel soon became fat and unruly;
the people grew heavy, plump, and stuffed!
Then they abandoned the God who had made them;

they made light of the Rock of their salvation.
¹⁶ They stirred up his jealousy by worshipping foreign gods;

they provoked his fury with detestable deeds.
¹⁷ They offered sacrifices to demons, which are not God,

to gods they had not known before,
to new gods only recently arrived,
to gods their ancestors had never feared.

¹⁸ You neglected the Rock who had fathered you;
you forgot the God who had given you birth.

¹⁹ “The LORD saw this and drew back,
provoked to anger by his own sons and daughters.

²⁰ He said, ‘I will abandon them;
then see what becomes of them.

For they are a twisted generation,
children without integrity.

²¹ They have roused my jealousy by worshipping things that are not God;
they have provoked my anger with their useless idols.

Now I will rouse their jealousy through people who are not even a people;

I will provoke their anger through the foolish Gentiles.

²² For my anger blazes forth like fire
and burns to the depths of the grave.
It devours the earth and all its crops
and ignites the foundations of the mountains.

²³ I will heap disasters upon them
and shoot them down with my arrows.

²⁴ I will weaken them with famine,
burning fever, and deadly disease.
I will send the fangs of wild beasts
and poisonous snakes that glide in the dust.

²⁵ Outside, the sword will bring death,
and inside, terror will strike
both young men and young women,
both infants and the aged.

²⁶ I would have annihilated them,
wiping out even the memory of them.

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Isaiah 1:2–4

² Listen, O heavens! Pay attention, earth!

This is what the LORD says:

“The children I raised and cared for
have rebelled against me.

³ Even an ox knows its owner,
and a donkey recognizes its master’s care—
but Israel doesn’t know its master.

My people don’t recognize my care for them.”

⁴ Oh, what a sinful nation they are—
loaded down with a burden of guilt.

They are evil people,
corrupt children who have rejected the LORD.
They have despised the Holy One of Israel and
turned their backs on him.

Isaiah 1:11–15, 21–23

¹¹ “What makes you think I want all your
sacrifices?”

says the LORD.

“I am sick of your burnt offerings of rams
and the fat of fattened cattle.

I get no pleasure from the blood
of bulls and lambs and goats.

¹² When you come to worship me,
who asked you to parade through my courts
with all your ceremony?

¹³ Stop bringing me your meaningless gifts;
the incense of your offerings disgusts me!

As for your celebrations of the new moon and the
Sabbath

and your special days for fasting—
they are all sinful and false.

I want no more of your pious meetings.

¹⁴ I hate your new moon celebrations and your
annual festivals.

They are a burden to me. I cannot stand them!

¹⁵ When you lift up your hands in prayer, I will not
look.

Though you offer many prayers, I will not
listen,

for your hands are covered with the blood of
innocent victims.

²¹ See how Jerusalem, once so faithful,
has become a prostitute.

Once the home of justice and righteousness,
she is now filled with murderers.

²² Once like pure silver,
you have become like worthless slag.

Once so pure,
you are now like watered-down wine.

²³ Your leaders are rebels,
the companions of thieves.

All of them love bribes
and demand payoffs,

but they refuse to defend the cause of orphans
or fight for the rights of widows.

Isaiah 1:24–31

²⁴ Therefore, the LORD, the LORD of Heaven’s
Armies, the Mighty One of Israel, says,

“I will take revenge on my enemies
and pay back my foes!

²⁵ I will raise my fist against you.

I will melt you down and skim off your slag.

I will remove all your impurities.

²⁶ Then I will give you good judges again
and wise counselors like you used to have.

Then Jerusalem will again be called the Home of
Justice

and the Faithful City.”

²⁷ Zion will be restored by justice;
those who repent will be revived by
righteousness.

²⁸ But rebels and sinners will be completely
destroyed,

and those who desert the LORD will be
consumed.

²⁹ You will be ashamed of your idol worship
in groves of sacred oaks.

You will blush because you worshiped
in gardens dedicated to idols.

³⁰ You will be like a great tree with withered
leaves, like a garden without water.

³¹ The strongest among you will disappear like
straw;

their evil deeds will be the spark that sets it on
fire.

They and their evil works will burn up together,
and no one will be able to put out the fire.

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Hosea 4:1–3

¹ Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel!
The LORD has brought charges against you,
 saying: “There is no faithfulness, no kindness, no
knowledge of God in your land.

² You make vows and break them;
 you kill and steal and commit adultery.
 There is violence everywhere—
 one murder after another.

³ That is why your land is in mourning,
 and everyone is wasting away.
 Even the wild animals, the birds of the sky,
 and the fish of the sea are disappearing.

Micah 6:1–4

¹ Listen to what the LORD is saying:
 “Stand up and state your case against me.

Let the mountains and hills be called to
 witness your complaints.

² And now, O mountains,
listen to the LORD’s complaint!

He has a case against his people.

He will bring charges against Israel.

³ “O my people, what have I done to you?
 What have I done to make you tired of me?
 Answer me!

⁴ For I brought you out of Egypt
 and redeemed you from slavery.

I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to help you.

Micah 6:10–12

¹⁰ What shall I say about the homes of the
 wicked

filled with treasures gained by cheating?

What about the disgusting practice

of measuring out grain with dishonest
 measures?

¹¹ How can I tolerate your merchants
 who use dishonest scales and weights?

¹² The rich among you have become wealthy
 through extortion and violence.

Your citizens are so used to lying
 that their tongues can no longer tell the truth.

Micah 6:13–15

¹³ “Therefore, I will wound you!

I will bring you to ruin for all your sins.

¹⁴ You will eat but never have enough.

Your hunger pangs and emptiness will remain.

And though you try to save your money,
 it will come to nothing in the end.

You will save a little,

but I will give it to those who conquer you.

¹⁵ You will plant crops

but not harvest them.

You will press your olives

but not get enough oil to anoint yourselves.

You will trample the grapes

but get no juice to make your wine.